

OPENING UP TO INDIE AUTHORS

HOW TO GET SELF-PUBLISHED BOOKS INTO
LIBRARIES, LITERARY FESTIVALS, AND
WHEREVER READERS ARE FOUND

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Opening Up to Indie Authors: How to Get Self-Published Books into Libraries,
Literary Festivals, and Wherever Readers Are Found

An Alliance of Independent Authors Guide: Campaign Series

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INTRODUCTION

You've written a book, hired a crack editor, encased it in a jacket that is a work of art and formatted the interior with lustrous fonts and arresting headings. You've put it out there, and lo! You've gained some readers. A fantastic achievement.

Now you'd like your book in a bookstore or library. You'd like to be on a panel at one of the literary events near you. You'd like to join the appropriate association for your genre. Except you can't. Even if you sell more and have more great reviews than writers headlining there, if you're a self-published author, there are some who will consider that you're not really published.

This is wrong, and it's time for it to change.

This guidebook is part of a campaign that aims to foster that change: the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) Open Up to Indie Authors campaign (which you'll find online with the hashtag #PublishingOpenUp).

Our organization represents self-publishers all over the world, and this book is for them. It's also for the book fairs and conferences, the award bodies and libraries, the festival and event organizers, and the retailers and reviewers who now need to accommodate self-publishing authors into their work.

In short, if you're someone who acts as a conduit between writer and reader, we're calling on you to open up. Open up to what? To the most exciting and expansive movement in the books business for centuries: author-publishing.

If you're a self-published writer, we're calling on you to read this book and come to understand that often it isn't an anti-indie conspiracy that sees you out in the cold. It's the various constraints the industry and its offshoots must operate within. And there is a lot you can do to help your cause.

Author-Publishing

There is no denying that publishing times are a-changing, and rapidly. One third of the bestselling books on Amazon and other ebook bestseller lists are self-published. ALLi has hundreds of professional members who have sold more than 50,000 copies of their books or had equivalent reads on Kindle Unlimited, and a number of members have sold millions. Many thousands of others are producing work of outstanding literary merit.

Corporate publishers, film and TV buyers, and literary agents are watching all this and scouting for successful self-published authors, hoping to woo them with a trade-publishing contract. But these changes have yet to be reflected in the literary infrastructure of libraries, newspaper and magazine reviews, bookstores, festivals, and prizes. This book, and the associated campaign, hope to change that.

At ALLi, independent authors come in many hues of independence. Some of us take a DIY self-publishing route; others hire an assisted-publishing service. A number of us use a trade-publisher for some of our projects, or some of our formats, such as translations. All are united by a common mindset: we see ourselves as the creative directors of our books, from concept to completion, from inspiration to publication.

And we appreciate that we are living in a golden age for writers and readers. We enjoy the freedom—and accept the responsibility—of running our own indie author enterprises.

Independent but Not Alone

The terms “self-publishing” and “independent author” are relative terms, perhaps even misnomers. Nobody who produces a good book does so alone, and publishing is always highly collaborative. To go indie is to become a team leader and to work in partnership with others. This guide is all about how to foster good relationships between self-publishing writers and other book professionals.

#PublishingOpenUp

ALLi’s Open Up to Indie Authors campaign (#PublishingOpenUp) includes a petition, lobbying of the industry, education seminars, and this guidebook by Debbie Young, commissioning editor at ALLi’s Self-Publishing Advice Center, and Dan Holloway, ALLi’s news editor.

This book demonstrates through education and example how authors and various personnel in the industry—librarians, booksellers, reviewers, festival organizers, and prize-giving committees—can successfully work together to the advantage of all. It has one simple aim: to remove discrimination against self-published books. There are two means by which we work to achieve this aim:

- We equip self-published authors with the information and attitude they need to collaborate successfully with other players in the book trade and the literary establishment.
- Within the literary establishment and among readers, we raise awareness of the high quality and professional standards offered by the best self-publishing authors, and we encourage their inclusion.

Our campaign urges the book trade and the literary environment to incorporate more self-published books into their programs. We know there are challenges in doing this, and we discuss them in detail throughout this book.

Up front, I'd like to address the challenge traditionalists most often lament: the sheer size of the book market now that anyone can publish.

There has been exponential growth in the number self-published books and there is, commensurately, supposedly considerable difficulty discovering good books among the bad. The key to unlocking this challenge is as simple as a change of mindset from scarcity thinking to abundance thinking, from commercial imperatives to creative.

Traditionally, when the only way to reach a reader was through print books sold in bookshops, publishing worked from a scarcity model grounded in commercial principles. It selected a few books to be published and protected their value with copyright. Today, the digital revolution means we all must work within an abundance model, grounded in creative principles.

Excess and redundancy are not causes for concern. This is, after all, how nature, the fundamental model for all creativity, works. An oak tree throws a lot of acorns to get one thriving baby oak.

But what about what one publishing executive once famously referred to as “the tsunami of crap?” Yes, self-publishing enables more poor-quality books to be published than ever before, but, in an abundance model, what's important is not how many bad books are enabled. They quickly fall into invisibility as nobody reads them. What matters is how many good books are enabled.

Throughout cultural history—in Italy during the Renaissance, in Elizabethan England, in Transcendentalist America, in Literary Revival Ireland—whenever new creative forms and formats flourish, an opening up occurs. The means of expression become available to more people. And while this facilitates more tyro and aspirant work—our publishing executive's “tsunami of crap”—it also results in more accomplished and virtuoso work. More masterpieces emerge, like the expanded tip of an enlarged mountain.

The problem of book discoverability in the new publishing ecosystem is a fear created by emotional or financial investment in

the old order. It is not, actually, a problem at all. Online algorithms are very effective, and getting better.

From the reader's perspective, you have a book description, other reader reviews, and a sample you can read before you buy. And book searches through categories and keywords are probably more effective discovery tools, if not necessarily as pleasant as the old method of bookstore browsing.

Good books are easier to find than they've ever been, including good self-published books, as Debbie and Dan so ably demonstrate in this guidebook.

Embracing Change

The unprecedented wave of literary expression that self-publishing is facilitating is a beautiful thing when viewed through a creative lens rather than a critical or commercial one. Creativity is never orderly and neat; it's colorful and chaotic and kaleidoscopic. We need a publishing scene that acknowledges and is prepared to be more reflective of that truth.

To renege on that challenge because we don't like the changes that are occurring in our industry is to fail the reading and writing community we exist to serve, and to cut off the work of the most vibrant, hard-working, forward-thinking, and entrepreneurial segment of the writing community from the support, acknowledgment, and readership it deserves.

Sign Our Petition

ALLi's Open Up to Indie Authors campaign has a very simple aim: to remove discrimination against self-published books. If you support the aims of this campaign, please sign our petition. Everyone at ALLi looks forward to the day when this campaign, and this guide, will no longer be necessary.

Orna Ross, Director, Alliance of Independent Authors

PART I

**TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY
PUBLISHING**

SELF-PUBLISHING TODAY

Publishing has gone full circle. Historically, writers, from medieval monks to Caxton to Swift, produced their own books. After the Industrial Revolution, market forces channeled most writers into the hands of dedicated commercial printing companies, many of which merged into large, powerful, global corporations such as Penguin Random House.

Now, in the twenty-first century, we can all once more be our own Caxton. Thanks to universally accessible, relatively affordable publishing technology, anyone can now publish a book and set up a stall from which to sell it. Writers no longer need to win the heart, mind, and wallet of a traditional publishing company to reach readers.

No longer a corporate preserve, publishing is becoming increasingly democratized, now offering a dazzling array of opportunities, from the low-cost ebook-only approach, to the trade paperback, to sumptuous full-color coffee-table books whose retail prices are in triple figures.

The development of print-on-demand (POD) technology has opened up affordable opportunities to print small runs, or even single copies. Potentially, all the world's an author and in control of its own authorial destiny. The internet and social media offer easy

communication between publisher, author, and reader, and digital publishing makes it possible to be a bestseller without printing a single physical copy, if that's your preference.

Used well, the sophisticated tools and services of the digital age enable authors to turn their own work into professional-looking, commercially viable books. The best are indistinguishable from those published by a big traditional publishing company. Detective work is often required to determine whether or not a book has been self-published.

There are still some authors who rush to push the "publish" button without making sure their book is the best it can be, who refuse to submit their golden words to proofreaders, or even spellcheckers, either due to artistic arrogance or from a lack of appreciation of the need. Some may simply have no idea that their book falls short of any standard of readability.

There will always be authors who release onto an already seething marketplace books riddled with typos, bad content, and poor cover designs that shriek "homemade," even at the thumbnail size displayed by online retailers. Not only advocates of traditional publishing cringe at the sight of such books. Self-published authors producing books to a professional standard find it perhaps even more galling.

The Rise of the "Authorpreneur"

It is a rare author-publisher who physically performs every task required to produce a professional book, even if they have the necessary skills. A qualified proofreader, for example, would still be unwise to do the proofing of their own book, being too close to the text emotionally and creatively.

The best self-publishers recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, and they surround themselves with a team of experts whose specialist skills complement the authors' own. Indeed, the term self-publishing is something of a misnomer, because there will almost certainly be others involved somewhere along the line.

The author's role in the publishing process is more one of creative

director and business manager, rather than designer-cum-typesetter-cum-proofreader-cum-formatter-cum-marketeer.

The hybrid term “authorpreneur” is increasingly used to indicate an author of this type: one who does all these things in a business-like and professional way, with the sophistication of a commercial publishing company but the freedom of the independent author.

Goodbye, Vanity Press—Hello, Author Services

Not all self-published authors wish to assume the mantle of the authorpreneur, especially if their prime objective is creative rather than commercial, but the high standards and reader reach they aim for will not be satisfied by old-fashioned vanity presses or jobbing printers who, in return for a hefty fee, turn any manuscript into a print book without adding any value in terms of editing, proofreading, or design.

There are plenty of options for authors who don’t have the time, the will, or the skills to carry out all the tasks required to publish their own book, from individual experts to assisted-publishing imprints run by experienced publishing professionals that offer the full range of facilities to supplement whatever skills the individual author lacks. Cover and interior design, copy-editing, proofreading, ebook formatting; these and other services enable even the most time-pressed technophobe to produce a professional looking book under the author’s direction, at the author’s expense.

While there are many excellent organizations and individuals who will help the self-published author produce a professional book at reasonable cost, there are also some over-priced and unscrupulous sharks who take advantage of the inexperienced author. Writer beware. (See the chapter “Associations and Societies” to find out about ALLi’s Watchdog Desk, which aims to expose such operations.)

Alternatively authors may prefer to choose individual freelancers specializing in whichever services they require, and there is a growing band of these available too. ALLi’s list of partner members is a good place to start shopping around. Again, see “Associations and Societies”

for more about this list. Many offer discounts and deals to ALLi members, and the membership website contains a list of current offers.

Whichever option author–publishers choose, they need to read all contracts carefully, consider their publishing goals, and retain as much control and return on investment as possible. Authors, and those who wish to advise them, will find ALLi’s companion guidebook in this series, *Choosing the Best Self-Publishing Companies and Services*, helps them make good choices. The ebook is free to ALLi members, and the ebook and paperback are also available to purchase.

The Rise of the Hybrid Author

When a self-publishing author reaches a certain level of success and visibility, agents and trade-publishers will come calling. Steena Holmes was picked up for an Amazon promotion that took her book from earning around \$5,000 a month to over \$100,000. Yes, per month.

Here, Steena talks about her decision to add a trade-publishing deal to her author-publishing life. Contrary to the expectations of many, that did not mean she was no longer an indie author:

I love being a self-published author and was in the middle of putting together a launch for my new book to follow my first bestseller, Finding Emma, when I started to receive offers, and (at first) I was caught off guard. Thanks to ALLi, however, I knew what my goals were as an author, and I knew what questions I wanted answered by both agent and publisher before I took any steps forward. My number one question was whether they would support my self-publishing goals.

Being an indie is no longer about choosing between being self-published or trade-published. Indie authors can embrace both. Could I continue to see the success I have had on my own? Absolutely. There are so many successful indie authors who choose that way.

But whichever way we do it, if we want to be career authors, we need

to start considering our career path as a business. That's another thing I learned from ALLi.

As indies, we already work with cover artists, editors, and marketing experts, and use their knowledge to help us launch our books and find new readers. So the idea of working with an agent or publisher should be no different. As an indie author, I can have the best of both worlds.

— STEENA HOLMES

ALLi agrees with this broad definition of an independent author. The defining qualities of the organization are its inclusiveness and diversity of approach, and all who want to self-publish a book well are welcomed. It defines as “indie” all authors who see themselves as the creative directors of their own books from concept to completion, who are independent in attitude, and who are responsible for their own publishing choices and destiny, no matter which type of publishing service they use, paid or trade.

Other indie authors are reluctant to accept a trade-publishing offer, being unwilling to relinquish the artistic and marketing freedom of self-publishing. When Steena published her thoughts above on ALLi's Self-publishing Advice blog, I (Dan) replied with my own credo:

The key point for me lies in Steena's tack change halfway through her compelling piece, predicated on that conditional “if you want a writing career.” My decision to self-publish was based largely on the fact that I didn't want a writing career. I would positively hate having a writing career.

I would have to write the kind of thing that just doesn't come naturally to me. I've written a thriller. One that has sold thousands of copies and has been a staff pick of the year at one of the UK's most famous bookshops. But writing it was like having my teeth pulled. And trying to write the sequel was like trying to conjure new teeth

from the raw bleeding pits where those teeth once were, and pulling them again.

I can't do it. I don't enjoy it. And I'm not particularly good at it.

In other words, to make a career at writing I would have to turn it into a day job. And I won't do that. Next to my wife, my cats, and my rats, writing is my great joy in life, and I want to keep it that way.

Not that I'm not ambitious. I'm hugely ambitious. I want to leave my mark on the cultural landscape for generations to come. I want to change lives, to change societies even, with my words.

I want to change the way people think about words themselves. I won't, of course. I'm not good enough. But it is my ambition. And the key thing is this: While I'm not good enough to make a career writing thrillers, trying to do it gives me no pleasure, but while I'm not good enough to change literature, the attempt is a delight.

Self-publishing gives me the freedom to do what I love and to push at any boundary I want with no considerations other than the writing.

— DAN HOLLOWAY

Another ALLi member, Indian author–publisher Rasana Atreya, is open to trade deals in principle, but has turned down offers to date and is confident this has been the right decision for her.

Around the time the unpublished manuscript of my novel, Tell A Thousand Lies, was shortlisted for the 2012 Tibor Jones South Asia Prize, I was also offered a publishing contract by a mainstream publisher here in India. I checked out their top-performing books, and sales for their print books in India were amazing, but they had barely any presence on Amazon, ebook-wise. I asked them if they'd let me keep my ebook rights. They refused. Considering that they were offering me 5 percent in royalties (with an average advance), and weren't doing anything with ebooks, I decided I could do better for myself.

For a first-time author this wasn't an easy decision; my friends

thought I was nuts, but it turns out this was the best thing I ever did. Most months I make more money than the advance they offered. In that publisher's defense, the advance was in Indian rupees, and was not bad. But 95 percent of my sales are in the US/UK markets, so the exchange rate works in my favor.

— RASANA ATREYA

Movement in the other direction is equally common, with authors starting out as trade-published, but side-stepping into self-publishing for a variety of reasons. Perhaps they are dissatisfied with the way a publisher handled their work, squeezed out through lack of sales or, increasingly, persuaded that self-publishing offers greater freedom and power to follow their own creative ambitions. ALLi's founder, Irish novelist and poet Orna Ross, falls into this category:

The single best thing I ever did in my writing life was decide to self-publish a book as an experiment. I'd worked in publishing and media for twenty years, and I loved lots about that work, so I wasn't sure if author-publishing would be right for me. I started small, with a poetry book and then a meditation manual, on the basis that they wouldn't be too widely read if I made a mess of it all. I didn't really expect anyone to buy them.

But they did. Not in huge numbers, but, after all, it was poetry and meditation. So I took the plunge and got the rights to my novels back from my publisher.

I was one of those many writers who hadn't liked the treatment given to my books (where I saw family dramas that brought readers through emotional and thought-provoking twists and turns, my publisher saw chick-lit). So I have been re-issuing the books in different formats with the titles and treatment I had originally envisaged when writing them.

Pressing that "Save and Publish" button on the first of these revamped books was one of the most joyous moments of my life. Heady!

— ORNA ROSS

Alternatively, it may be a simple commercial decision. Hugh Howey, having achieved tremendous sales of his ebooks, when offered a trade-publishing contract would only consent to print books, retaining his ebook rights and continuing the practice that had already served him well. If it ain't broke...

More and more writers are keeping a foot in both camps. They may continue to have some books trade-published while branching off in new directions with self-published titles that their current publisher doesn't wish to commission, perhaps because they are in a different genre than usual or because they are outside the publisher's usual portfolio. British medical broadcaster, journalist, and academic Dr Carol Cooper has many medical and healthcare books to her credit, but she chose to self-publish her novels.

Increasingly, trade-published authors are using self-publishing facilities to revive backlist titles that their trade-publishing house has allowed to go out of print. When *USA Today* bestselling novelist Helen Hollick's British publishers decided to drop her backlist on the dubious grounds that historical novels were falling out of fashion, Helen decided to self-publish in the UK, while remaining trade-published on the other side of the Atlantic.

As any indie author who has fallen foul of a change of heart by a trade-publishing house will tell you, self-published books, unlike their trade counterparts, have no use-by date. The authors may market for as long as they wish, whereas the trade-publisher will tire of supporting a book that isn't selling in large numbers. In the world of ebooks and POD, all books are immortal. They need never go out of print or get pulped to make room in the publisher's warehouse for the next big thing. Self-published authors have no "time's winged chariot" at their back, other than their own mortality.

On reacquiring their books' rights and self-publishing their backlist, many previously trade-published authors are pleasantly surprised to discover that with self-publishing comes a much higher profit margin. The typical author's cut of 35 to 70 percent of retail price for an ebook is a substantial improvement on the typical 5 to 15 percent for a trade-published print book.

There are many other significant freedoms. Authors now have the opportunity to change titles, cover designs, or even some of the content of the books, no longer constrained by their publisher's or, more likely these days, the chain store or supermarket buyers', preferences.

Every Author's Goal: Reaching Readers

It's clear that self-published and trade-published books can coexist comfortably side by side in an author's portfolio. No matter how a book is published, every author seeks readers, and there are many ways of reaching them:

- retailers
- reviewers
- libraries
- festivals
- awards
- professional associations
- word-of-mouth recommendations.

It seems reasonable that books of equal quality should be treated on equal terms in all these spheres, no matter how they have been published. It is, therefore, a source of frustration and disappointment to self-published authors who have produced top-quality books to encounter glass ceilings or dead ends along the way, simply because they have managed their production themselves.

The fault is not all on the side of the establishment. Among certain self-published authors there exists an assumption that simply

publishing a book gives them *de facto* equal rights in the marketplace with trade-published bestsellers, an assumption that is not realistic for those who have produced a poor-quality book.

It's one thing to have your book rejected because it is not good enough: shoddy cover, dreadful content, or copy full of typos. To have it rejected because of the lack of a trade-publisher's name on the spine, even though it's a match for trade-published books in every other respect, feels uncomfortably like snobbery or literary prejudice.

But self-published authors may do much to help their own cause. First, they should be open-minded about their prospects and not assume prejudice before they meet it—it may not happen. They also need to be realistic. They are unlikely to have the length and breadth of experience enjoyed by a trade-publishing company, so they need to gain a clear understanding of how the book trade and all the associated operations work. With realistic expectations, they will meet less disappointment. If they are familiar with retailers' standard expectations for trade discount but are unwilling to meet them, they should not feel hard done by if their local bookshop refuses to stock their books.

Equally, the publishing trade needs to recognize and respect the high quality of books now being self-published. The next chapter will, therefore, offer easy ways to identify self-published books of all kinds to help other members of the book trade make informed rather than prejudiced judgments.

HOW TO FIND GREAT SELF-PUBLISHED BOOKS

First, find your self-published book! Echoing the apocryphal beginning of Georgian chef Hannah Glasse’s recipe for jugged hare, “first, catch your hare,” it is not as easy as it ought to be to find self-published books.

Largely excluded from bricks-and-mortar stores and from festivals, events, public libraries, and most literary awards, self-published books are not exactly high profile offline. That’s not because, as is sometimes assumed, they only exist in digital form. There are plenty of self-published print books in existence; the best ones are indistinguishable from trade-published books and do not identify themselves.

In the bookshops that stock them, self-published books nestle on the shelves among their trade-published peers, camouflaged by their quality. Bookstores usually display self-published books among their main stock, not in a separate section unless, for example, particularly highlighting them as books by local authors and publishers. Indie bookshops are more likely to stock them than bookstore chains, given their shared independent spirit, unconstrained by head-office policy.

While online stores that stock exclusively self-published books

exist, such as PJ Boox in Florida, few customers go looking specifically for self-published work; they're just after good books.

Checking Credentials

When you come across a new book from an unfamiliar source, perhaps one that you've been sent as a free sample for consideration, it may not be obvious whether it is self-published. Yes, there are some clear pointers, such as authors simply putting their own names as publisher on the spine or using a company name obviously allied to a personal name.

However, many self-published authors choose to set up their own imprints or micro-publishing companies, or at least use a "trading as" name, even if they publish only their own books, because a different name and a corporate logo on the jacket add a professional touch. Finnish novelist Helena Halme uses the imprint Newhurst Press, which exclusively publishes her own, very beautiful, books.

Some self-published authors go a step further and band together to form a collective. Triskele Books is an international cooperative of six authors: Jasper Dorgan (England), Gillian E Hamer (Wales), JJ Marsh (Switzerland), Liza Perrat (France), Barbara Scott-Emmett (England), JD Smith (England), and Catriona Troth (England). Working together gives them many other advantages besides a shared branding.

Another significant proportion of self-published authors employ service providers to carry out the full package of design and production processes for their books, with the service provider, funded by the author, playing the role of publisher.

Checking the publisher's credentials, then, is not a clear-cut way of identifying which books are self-published.

Online Research

The next step is to research the book online. If it's retailing anywhere other than the author's own website, it will almost certainly be on

Amazon. You don't have to be an Amazon customer or supporter to take advantage of its vast public database of books, the largest and most comprehensive in the world. Even some bricks-and-mortar stores that find Amazon anathema use its website as a useful information resource.

Go to the Amazon website that serves your territory and search the author, title, or the international standard book number (ISBN) of the book. (If you're not sure which Amazon website to use, just go to amazon.com, which will recognize your origin and suggest the appropriate URL for your location.)

Few self-published books are not listed on Amazon. Only a small number of self-published authors avoid it, perhaps for reasons of politics or principle, or because they wish solely to hand-sell their books, or to distribute them via their own website to their circle of trusted readers.

A book's listing on Amazon will give you plenty of evidence to help you judge its quality in the following areas:

- cover image
- book description (the equivalent to the blurb on the jacket, plus often a lot more useful information, including pre-publication reviews—the space allowed is quite generous)
- current bestseller sales rank (indicative only of sales made via Amazon, in the territory covered by the particular Amazon site you are viewing, and only logged once the book has sold a small number of copies)
- its ranking (its bestseller status in relevant categories and overall)
- reviews submitted to the Amazon site, plus a count of and link to reviews left on the largest site, Amazon.com
- a link to the author profile in Amazon's Author Central service, provided the author has completed this profile for the territory you're viewing
- name of publisher
- date of publication

- number of pages
- size of print book, if available
- the opportunity to “Look Inside” and read a sample 10 percent of the text
- for ebooks, the chance to download a free sample to your Kindle or Kindle app on a non-Amazon device (PC, laptop, tablet, phone, etc.) to read at your leisure
- availability from Amazon and approved Amazon partners (including secondhand copies).

Judging Self-Published Books by Their Covers

Looking first at the cover, you will find it difficult to distinguish the very best self-published books from their trade-published peers, because their authors will have engaged experts and specialists to provide a professional-looking, genre-appropriate, visually appealing, and effective cover, visible at thumbnail size online. These experts are also likely to be working for the big trade-publishers, offering the same quality to both kinds of customer. This makes it hard for the shopper to spot which is which.

For various reasons, for example of low budget or poor judgment, some self-published authors decline to consider design. It’s easy to pick out such covers, with their illegible fonts, ill-chosen titles, garish colors, and poor-quality photos or amateurish illustrations. Or indeed, there may be nothing on the cover at all to indicate the book’s genre, simply the name and title on a blank background.

Seasoned shoppers will quickly learn to spot self-published books with covers made from free templates and stock images that authors use to put together their own cover designs at little or no cost. In the right hands, someone with a natural eye for good design and the vernacular of their genre, these templates can be effective. In the wrong hands, they leap off the screen, shouting “amateur.”

Looking Inside

Amazon, Kobo, and other e-tailers make it easy to sample the text of the book, so that potential purchasers can try before they buy. This can be done in two ways. The first is by clicking the “Look Inside” button that enables you to read the first few pages of text. Alternatively, Amazon offers its customers the facility to download, completely free of charge and with no obligation to buy, a substantial free sample of the book’s content.

You can do this without ever having to make a purchase, setting up an account solely for this purpose, even if you don’t own an Amazon-compatible ereader (Kindle). Instead, you can read your free samples on other electronic devices for which free Kindle apps are available.

At the end of each sample is an invitation to download the rest of the book immediately, with the cost to be charged to your account. Don’t worry if you hit the “Accept” button by mistake. If you report your error to Amazon within a short time, it will cancel your purchase and make a refund, to allow for slips of the finger.

The free sample is usually sufficient to allow the reader to get a feel for the content: whether it’s well written, well formatted, and free of error, and whether it is enticing to you. Sorting the wheat from the chaff is easy.

Third-Party Evidence: Readers’ Reviews

For further input, it’s worth reading the readers’ reviews on Amazon, although these should never be taken entirely at face value. Amazon has taken pains to minimize misuse of the review system, but some abuse still happens, such as writers or publishers setting up bogus accounts to review their own books.

Even a cursory glance at the reviews will almost always be helpful in determining the value of a book. The star rating is not always useful because different readers allocate their ratings differently. A rave review filled with unstinting praise may carry only three stars if that particular reviewer only gives four or five stars in exceptional

circumstances, while some five-star reviews sound less enthusiastic if written by reviewers who only ever give five stars to everything they review.

Also check that a low rating has been given for the right reasons. Such things as a delivery failure or the reader mistakenly ordering the wrong book can result in a disgruntled one-star review. It's also worth reading the other reviews left by a reader whose report sounds unnatural or unlikely. Your findings may lead you to disregard the opinions of particular reviewers if all their reviews are either scathing or unstinting in their praise, or if they've only reviewed books by one author.

There is also a growing number of reader reviews on other online retailers' sites, such as Kobo, whose elegant book review sections are very easy on the eye; on the websites of bricks-and-mortar chains; and on social media specifically designed for readers' discussions of books, most notably Goodreads.

Although Goodreads is now owned by Amazon, the two sites feature different reviews. There is, however, a lot of overlap between Goodreads networkers and Amazon customers, and some, but not all, post the same review on both sites. It will be interesting to see how each site develops as their merger settles down.

Wherever you choose to examine readers' reviews, bear in mind that, although there are plenty of gifted, insightful reviewers on all such sites, these are individual customer viewpoints and not professional criticism.

Book Evaluation Sites

Another, perhaps more detached, view may come from book evaluation sites that engage qualified reviewers to review books submitted by self-published authors.

One such is Awesome Indies, founded by Tahlia Newland because, she says, "I was so frustrated with buying books with good star ratings only to discover that they were so badly written I couldn't finish them." Another site is Indie BRAG.

On these sites, authors are invited to submit their books, and those deemed worthy are awarded a badge as an indication of professional quality. For books not awarded a badge or other indicator of quality, such organizations may offer guidance on improvements required to meet their stringent standards. Thus they are not only signposting when high standards are found in self-published books, they are also helping authors achieve those standards.

Submission to some of these programs is free, others charge so they are able to compensate their reviewers for their time and effort, but medallions cannot be bought. They can only be earned by the production of self-published books that meet professional standards and satisfy readers.

Some of the sites also gain recompense for their services via affiliate links to online retailers for the books they review.

While it may be worth looking out for such signs of quality, the absence of this sort of indicator does not mean a self-published book is not of high quality. First, the use of book evaluation sites is optional, and only a small proportion of self-publishing authors go through that process. Second, they rate books against the standards and expectations for trade-published books. They are not prepared for appreciating less commercial work, such as experimental writing or highly literary fiction, for which self-publishing is an important outlet.

Other Awards

Many industry book award schemes are not open to self-published books at all. The Australian novelist Elisabeth Storrs, whose trade-published debut novel was nominated for awards, found her second book automatically disqualified from her country's Prime Minister's Literary Award because it was self-published.

ALLi members have been rejected from many such schemes with blunt and unsubstantiated statements from organizers, who claim variations on "We'd just be inundated with rubbish." Some awards are exclusively open to self-published books and uphold high standards.

Any recipient of the respected Rubery Award should be considered to have a quality endorsement.

Sadly, other schemes have been devised to prey on the hopes and aspirations of naive self-published authors, requiring substantial entry fees for little return. To check the value of an award, it's best to visit the organizer's website, read the terms and conditions, and look at past winners. If the gallery of winners is filled with unprofessional-looking covers, or there are as many winners as entrants, the award is likely a scam. As always, you can check with ALLi's Watchdog Desk if in doubt.

Author Websites

Further evidence of authors' skills and professionalism may be found on their websites. Any self-published authors who take their writing and their need to market their book seriously will have set up some kind of online presence. The copy on their blog or home page will be a reliable indicator of the quality of their writing elsewhere.

Free Review Copies

None of these activities are a substitute for buying and reading the book to assess in its entirety. If you're a bookseller seriously considering stocking or promoting a self-published book and want to try before you buy, ask the author if they would be prepared to offer you a free preview copy. The author's willingness to part with a copy for serious evaluation will indicate their faith in the quality of their own book and the earnestness of their intention to do business with you.

Writers' Organizations

Another useful indicator of any author's professional intent is whether they belong to a serious organization for writers. As will be discussed

later in this book, many long-established authors' societies do not yet permit self-published authors to join, considering them not officially published without the endorsement of a trade-publishing contract, even if as a self-published author they have sold thousands of books and gained hundreds of enthusiastic reviews from readers. Or they may permit them to join, but only in a separate category, for example as an associate member or some other effectively not-yet-published category.

ALLi takes a different approach: Any published writer may join at the author member level, whether self-published, trade-published, or a mixture of both. ALLi also has a professional membership for author-publishers earning a living from their work. Those as yet unpublished may join as associate members, to be upgraded to author status on publication. There is also a partner member status for author service providers. While membership of ALLi is not in itself proof of the quality of an author's books, it does indicate a writer's serious intent to self-publish to professional standards.

The chapter "Associations and Societies" provides an overview of how ALLi is working to help self-published authors work more closely with other organizations.

International Standard Book Numbers (ISBNs)

Finally, a note to authors: If you want your book to be stocked by libraries and bookstores, it's advisable for you to purchase your own ISBNs from whichever body allocates them in your country.

An ISBN is a unique identifier assigned to a book in a specific format. It's how a librarian or somebody at the cash register or till in a bookstore records that it's the print edition being bought, for example, not the ebook, which must have its own separate, different ISBN.

The entire book trade uses ISBNs as identifiers for stock control, so if you want to be included in trade systems, you need to allocate a unique ISBN to each format of every title you publish.

ALLi recommends you purchase your own ISBNs rather than

relying on the free ones allocated by service providers like CreateSpace or Smashwords. Why? Karen Myers said it beautifully:

My name is my brand. My books belong to me, and my stamp upon them is an ISBN, a unique and universal identifier that will bring them out of darkness to anyone's search, years from now and in databases I cannot envision. It doesn't matter whether the book is printed or in digital form—that's just a detail. I would no more omit my ISBN from a book I've written than I would take away my name.

I've heard people comment, well, you don't need an ISBN to publish an ebook at this site or that, and that's a true statement. But when you're caught up in the here and now of the latest development in the explosion that is new indie publishing, it's easy to lose perspective.

Consider the following situation: I publish a book, digital only. I don't bother with an ISBN number. I distribute it on Amazon, which assigns it an ASIN, an Amazon product code. I distribute it on Barnes & Noble, which assigns it a B&N product code. I distribute it on Kobo, which assigns it an ISBN owned by Kobo, so my book will appear to be published by Kobo, not me. I distribute it on Smashwords, which assigns it an ISBN owned by Smashwords, so my book will appear to be published by Smashwords, not me.

With the exception of Smashwords, none of these identifiers appear within the eBook itself.

And now, let twenty years go by... Barnes & Noble and Smashwords are out of business. Amazon changes its product code conventions and no longer uses ASINs. There is no searchable database made available by Amazon for the old ASINs. Kobo, which owns the ISBN it provided, controls what the Bowker Books In Print or successor database contains and updates the information about your book in ways you would not approve of. Since you have no ISBN of your own that's the only record of your book in Books In Print.

Someone who chanced across a reference to your book based on an old copy from Barnes & Noble can't find it because the B&N identifier

is no longer alive, and may or may not connect it with a Kobo record in Books In Print, which has a completely different identifier.

Does this seem like a good thing to you?

— KAREN MYERS

You may only order ISBNs from the single supplier appointed to serve the country in which you operate, for example Bowker in the US and Nielsen in the UK. Prices vary by territory. In some countries, the cost is subsidized or even absorbed by the government. In others, they can be a significant expense. Whatever the price, ISBNs may be sold singly or in blocks, on a sliding price scale.

At a minimum, for each title, authors should allocate one ISBN to the ebook, one to the print book, and another to the audiobook. Some of our members use one ISBN to cover everything; some give a separate ISBN to their .mobi file (the format used by Amazon), and a different one to their .epub file (one of the formats used by other e-readers), and a different one again to a downloadable PDF edition on their website.

Similarly, in print they give a different ISBN to POD editions, when they do a consignment print run for bookshop distribution, and in each of the different print book, or “pbook,” formats: trade paperbacks, mass-market paperbacks, hardbacks, and so on.

ALLi’s advice is to take a middle path and have separate ISBNs for electronic (ebook), print (pbook), and audio (abook) editions of each publication, the exception being if you decide to have more than one type of pbook format. You should have separate ISBNs for paperback, hardback, or unusual editions of pbooks.

The logic is that Amazon is an ecosystem unto itself and uses its own identifiers, so your ISBN there is an extra. Libraries, bookstores, or readers who want to look up your ebook can find it and order it in the format they need, which is .epub. When it comes to the pbook, they will want to have the ability to choose between hardback, paperback, or special edition.

Similarly, readers ordering a book online may not care if an ebook is a .mobi or an .epub, but they do want to know if a pbook is hard or soft cover, and they are prepared to pay more for hard covers and special editions.

When you upload your pbooks to online stores, and in dealing with wholesalers, distributors, or bookstores, be sure to make these distinctions clear.

Owning your own ISBNs means you are the publisher of record for those titles and allows the books to be tracked back to you.

ABOUT THE #PUBLISHINGOPENUP CAMPAIGN

In 2012, a new global organization for self-publishers was founded by Orna Ross, novelist, poet, and lecturer in creative and imaginative process.

Ross was previously published. Her nonfiction was with Attic Press, an independent Dublin-based publisher, and her fiction was published by Penguin. She began to publish her own work because she sought greater creative freedom than was offered by her publishers. She reacquired the rights to her backlist and now self-publishes, to commercial success and critical acclaim, novels, poetry, and books about creativity.

Working independently made her realize that self-published authors operating in isolation would benefit from a nonprofit organization to unite them in a spirit of mutual support and assistance. An online organization would enable indie authors, as they were starting to be called, and their advisors, to communicate easily across continents, share best practices and advice, and help each other develop the self-publishing sector along more professional, organized lines, thus integrating those writers who wanted a presence in the book trade's existing infrastructure of bookstores, libraries, literary festivals, awards, and prizes.

As well as giving individual authors support to self-publish well and reach their readers, our vision was that our members would work together to raise awareness and respect for the self-publishing option. One of our aims is to build mutually supportive relationships between self-published authors and all those who influence their success: the media, retailers, reviewers, festival organizers, award schemes, and other professional bodies. Self-publishing can be daunting for an individual writer, especially if met with condescension or hostility, but we gain strength in numbers.

— ORNA ROSS

The organization's attitude to applicants and members is as inclusive as it is possible to be. ALLi welcomes trade-published authors who seek to self-publish, hybrid authors whose aim is to flourish in both spheres, self-published authors whose success earns them trade-publishing contracts, and those who wish to move in that direction. ALLi aims to be an advocate for the increasing number of authors who prefer the self-publishing option, and the independence and greater income it allows.

During the first year of ALLi's operation, Orna Ross enlisted the support of established experts in the field of self-publishing to form a valuable central resource. This includes specialists in literary values, creativity, book design, marketing, distribution, rights and other legal issues, and finance and business management. She also assembled a core support team to nurture ALLi members and disseminate ALLi's messages effectively through all available channels, including a website, an advice blog, and a strong social media presence.

Since its launch, ALLi's membership has grown substantially, adding members from English-speaking territories all around the globe, including Africa, the Americas, Australasia, Europe, the Indian subcontinent, and the UK.

Campaigning activity is now stepping up to the next level. Having

demonstrated that self-publishing is a viable option for authors to produce high-quality books, ALLi is now devoting a lot of energy to its Open Up to Indie Authors campaign to encourage equal opportunities for all writers of equal merit, regardless of their route to publication.

Petition

To demonstrate the collective will for attitudes to change, ALLi has created a petition addressed to various personnel in the literary, book, and publishing ecosystem, with its addressees regularly updated. It reads as follows:

I and the Alliance of Independent Authors urge you to find ways to include self-publishing writers as a matter of priority.

As you know, more and more writers are turning to self-publishing, and many such authors are producing work of proven value to readers.

While recognizing that there are challenges in incorporating indie authors, ALLi believes doing so has become a necessity if bookstores, libraries, literary events, and reviewers are to be inclusive of writers and fully serve readers.

I trust you will give this matter the attention it deserves.

Thank you for your consideration,

[Your name]

The link to the petition is: bit.ly/OUTIA-petition. If you have not yet signed it, please do—and help spread the word.

Responses to the Campaign

Already the campaign is having some effects, with various booksellers, librarians, prize-giving committees, event organizers,

and reviewers establishing structures that allow them to work with self-publishing writers. In some quarters, most noticeably new publishing platforms where there is already considerable acceptance, the campaign is pushing an open door.

Here is Mark Lefebvre, director of self-publishing and author relations at Kobo, himself an author (as Mark Leslie) and former bookseller:

I think the Open Up to Indie Authors program is an important one. Having worked as a bookseller for twenty years, I recognize the critical role that local booksellers and librarians play in supporting local authors.

What booksellers take great pleasure in is when they are able to put the right books into the right customer's hands at the right time. When that happens, magic happens.

It is not a simple business transaction, but part of a wonderful relationship of sharing and trust.

One of the most satisfying experiences I have had as a bookseller involved discovering a brilliant local writer and sharing their work with customers I knew would really enjoy it. It doesn't matter who publishes the book or where it is from. What matters is not just that the book is a good one, but an excellent choice for THAT customer.

Any program that helps introduce booksellers and authors is one that will further enrich reading culture globally.

When I speak with authors, I regularly remind them of the importance of embracing their local bookstore, getting to know the people who work there.

The Kobo Writing Life team has already begun campaigns designed to bring indie authors and local booksellers together, demonstrating that working together, they can really help one another out. We have hosted, in collaboration with local booksellers, events in London, Toronto, New York, and Portland, so far, and are looking forward to doing much more.

Kobo is eager to work with ALLi on the Open Up to Indie Authors program and publication, thereby continuing to assist authors with

navigating the critical yet often complex layers, relationships, and processes surrounding the book industry.

— MARK LEFEBVRE

Through Kobo's links with retail partners like WHSmith in the UK and the American Booksellers' Association in the US, ALLi members are able to launch their books, in conjunction with this guidebook, in their local bookstore. All self-publishing writers are given access to Kobo's distribution partners on four continents, with over 10,000 retail outlets, and access to more than 100 million consumers. This access will continue to grow as Kobo expands its network.

As in just about every aspect of publishing in the twenty-first century, attitudes to self-published authors are evolving fast. This campaign and guidebook aim to hasten and shape that evolution to the advantage of all.

Part Two of this guidebook, "Equal Opportunities for All Books," offers the self-published author advice on how to gain the best chance of inclusion in the literary and publishing ecosystem, on an equal footing. We will address in turn the most important bodies that help determine the success and acceptance of authors everywhere: the retailers, the reviewers, the libraries, the festivals and events, the awards and prizes, and the associations and societies.

PART II

**EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES
FOR ALL BOOKS**

BOOK RETAILERS

Bricks-and-Mortar Bookstores

For many authors, there's nothing like seeing their book on display in a bricks-and-mortar bookstore. To even the most ardent ebook fan, getting a print book stocked by a physical bookstore can be the mark of a credible author. Rightly or wrongly, securing an in-store signing event can make an author feel that they have really "arrived."

If asked to describe their ideal relationship with their local high street or shopping mall retailer, authors, whether trade- or self-published, are likely to describe this scenario:

- Their book is seen from the street, with a shop window display to catch the eye of passers-by, luring customers in with the sight of the book.
- Inside the store is a large supply of their books, stacked cover uppermost on a display table in the store's main route for traffic, near the entrance.
- A supply of their promotional bookmarks or postcards on

the counter catch the eye of anyone who has managed to make it to the till without spotting the book itself.

- Sales advisors who are familiar with the book, having read it themselves, gladly act as promoters on the author's behalf.

After all, what a great job bookstore staff must have, being surrounded all day by books they love, hooking them up with eager readers who will love them too and be grateful for the staff's support, right?

The Reality of Retailing

Those window and table-top displays every author covets? In chains, these are usually bought and paid for at a substantial price by big trade-publishing companies for books that are likely to repay their investment many times over. Often these will be books by bestselling authors, possibly celebrities or authors with high profiles for other reasons, such as spin-offs from a top TV show or movie, as highlighted in *The Guardian* article "Publish and be branded: The new threat to literature's laboratory" (13 January 2014).

In independent bookshops, where the proprietor's displays are not dictated or funded by head-office deals, there will be more freedom and flexibility, but the bookseller will still need a compelling reason—namely the prospect of runaway sales and profit—to give your book that top spot. Just because you are a local resident and a regular customer does not earn your book the right to take up shop space. What does is its potential and actual sales, and it's down to you to convince the store that your book has wings.

The restricted counter space by the till is usually reserved for high-margin, last-minute impulse buys (bookmarks, gadgets, stationery, book tokens, etc.) to boost the average customer's in-store spend and so enhance the shop's profit. Shop counters are not free advertising space. If you're itching to give away your stash of bookmarks, they'll be better used elsewhere, such as public libraries, festivals, and other events.

Store staff are busy, stressed, and pressed for time. They receive frequent deliveries of stock to be put away, and regular visits from trade-publishers' sales reps giving them a speedy pitch for dozens of books at a time, at around ten seconds per book. Sure, they'll have some appreciative regular customers who brighten up their day, but they'll also have a lot of trickier customers to contend with.

Though likely to be avid readers in their own time, booksellers may not be personally interested in your genre or sufficiently sold on it to buy it to read at home. They certainly don't get to read books all day, any more than a bakery assistant spends their day eating free cakes. If you're on friendly terms with any member of your local bookstore's staff, offering them a complimentary copy of your book may not be a bad idea, if accepting it is in line with the bookstore's policy.

To share a little of bookstore staff's experience, read Jen Campbell's *Weird Things Customers Say in Bookshops* and its sequel. This will help you imagine what it would be like to be on the receiving end, all day, every day, of questions such as, "Is there a sequel to *The Diary of Anne Frank*?" or customers wanting to return a copy of *Where's Wally?* "Because I've found him."

The typical sales advisor's day does not allow copious amounts of time to deal with individual authors who pitch up unannounced to chat at length about their latest book. On average, high-street booksellers are approached at least once every day by a self-published author. That's a lot of time each week in an already demanding job in an area of the economy having to work incredibly hard to stay afloat.

What's more, some booksellers feel that they have been burned by self-publishers in the past and don't want to risk it again. One bookstore owner of our acquaintance took on a pile of an author's books after striking up a conversation with him and displayed them prominently. Days after he started selling them enthusiastically, customers began coming in to complain about substandard production. Now he is wary of ever touching a self-published book again.

Chain Stores Versus Independents

It's reasonable to assume that independent bookstores will be more sympathetic to the lot of the self-published author because they both value independence. In that they are not answerable to any head-office directives, independent bookstores do have more freedom, but that doesn't allow them to stock any book without first being sure it makes economic sense, or to be blindly supportive of any other entity that flourishes the words "independent" or "local" as if they're a secret handshake or a magic key to the door.

Just like the big chains, independent bookstores must make money. They may not have to accommodate pressure from shareholders or the stock market, but to remain in business, they must at least break even. The sad demise of far too many independent bookstores in recent years demonstrates the difficulty of their task.

Independent of spirit they may be, but selling books at a profit is still their livelihood. I (Debbie) interviewed the proprietor of two independent bookstores near where I live. The two-store Yellow-Lighted Bookshop chain is owned by the enterprising, free-spirited Hereward Corbett, who, before turning independent, held senior positions in major British bookstore chains. He told me: "I love my job, and I love books, but at the end of the day, I have my mortgage to pay." Can't argue with that!

No matter how much bookstore proprietors value their independence, unless they are eccentric millionaires who are to booksellers as Marie Antoinette was to shepherdesses, they are driven by an unforgiving financial imperative. They should not be expected to subsidize self-published authors, nor to treat them more favorably than those who are trade-published, however sympathetic they may feel.

Self-Published Versus Trade-Published

Undoubtedly booksellers still feel more comfortable buying their stock from trade-publishers' sales reps, who tout a hundred-plus

books on every visit, than from a self-published author turning up with just the one. Trade-publishers provide the assurance of quality control: their stock is a safe investment. Trade-publishers also make the necessary administration easy for the bookseller: a single invoice covers hundreds of books and authors, payable directly, with a handsome discount (usually at least 40 percent and often as much as 60 percent), and on generous credit terms, on a sale-or-return basis, with no questions asked.

If your self-published book has been rejected by a bookstore, it's very easy to play the offended card and blame those old demons "the gatekeepers." But hold fire. Many trade-published authors also despair of getting their books stocked in-store, elbowed out, as they see it, by the big names on which trade-publishers focus most of their marketing spend. The average trade-published author does not necessarily have an advantage over the average self-published one.

The self-published author, acting alone, will always be more demanding of the bookseller's time in proportion to the number of books sold, no matter how efficiently you work. On the other hand, the self-published author will always have certain advantages over the trade-published author.

Self-Published Authors' Advantages

Self-published authors have numerous advantages, such as:

- the commercial freedom to represent themselves, on their own terms, rather than being governed by a commercial publishing contract
- the acceptance of the need to carry out the hands-on marketing of their own book themselves
- the drive and passion to do all in their power to market it (without this passion, they'd never have made it to the finishing line of self-publishing their own book in the first place)
- the sense of responsibility for their book's marketing

- a growing sophistication and ability to market their book (the best indies are much more commercially aware and savvy than the average trade-published author)
- the power to negotiate directly and to then make their own decisions.

All of these advantages ought to be welcomed by the bookstore buyer or proprietor. Self-published authors should introduce themselves to local booksellers and ask if they are willing to sell books on consignment. In this arrangement, if the store carries a few copies of the book, and they sell, the author and store split the earnings 50/50, or some rate agreed in advance.

Unlike in a traditional distribution arrangement where the bookstore pays for the books up front and is refunded for those that don't sell, books sold on consignment only cost the owner shelf space. It's up to the individual author to make those benefits clear to the bookstore.

How to Give Your Book the Best Chance of Being Stocked by a Bookstore

There are basics you must take care of to ensure a bookstore or library buyer will treat you with as much consideration as a trade-published author.

Match Professional Quality

First and foremost, before you go anywhere near a bookstore, make sure your book is the very best it can possibly be. This should have happened before you hit the publish button, and if it didn't, your book will stand out, for the wrong reasons, as self-published in the setting of a bookstore. If you put your book in an identity parade alongside trade-published books, would anyone be able to pick it out as the villain? It's down to you to make sure they cannot.

Bear in mind that many indie booksellers are keen, in principle, to

support self-published authors, but they can only do so with a decent product that stands a good chance of commercial success, as indicated by Scottish-Canadian novelist Catriona Troth's conversation with the proprietors of one award-winning independent bookstore:

When I asked them about stocking self-published books, they exchanged a look. "We do take books from self-published authors, on sale or return," I was told. "And some are very good. But some are awful, just dreadful. You could never promote them. The look of some of the books... We try to be encouraging, but it's hard."

— CATRIONA TROTH

Catriona's books met the required standards and are now selling well from that shop's shelves, and she's also purposefully driving traffic to the shop with her own PR. Make sure you do the same with yours.

A Good Jacket

Your book's genre should be evident at a glance from the look of its cover, and it should sit comfortably alongside other books similar in nature.

No matter how superlative its content, your book will never, ever appear on a display table or even front-facing on a shelf if it looks like the hangover following a night of Photoshop and Clipart cocktails. That's the one thing bookshop owners can't hide, the thing that affects how their pride and joy—their bookstore—looks. Remember how angry you were at people suggesting ridiculous things for your cover? That's how a bookshop owner feels at the thought of having an awful cover on display.

Size Matters

Trade paperbacks are usually 8" x 5.5", but many self-published books are less usual sizes, such as 9" x 6", because of the different print sources used for production. This may not matter to some retailers, but others will reject outright oddities that will make their shelves look untidy or simply will not fit on their shelves. Think—and investigate—before you print.

Appropriate Interior Design

Interior layout, though obviously not visible from afar, is also important. Unprofessional or unsuitable typography is an instant giveaway of an amateur book. Be sure to consider the following when having your book typeset:

- **Typeface:** Is it legible, clear, and consistent, with an appropriate font choice for the subject and target reader? Many of the fonts that are popular for word processing, like Times New Roman or Arial, do not work well for print).
- **Pagination:** Are the page numbers discreet, the right size, and positioned correctly?
- **Margins:** Are they justified, as in trade-published books?
- **Gutters:** Are they wide enough to make the book easy to read?
- **Professional finish:** Is your book free of typos, rogue spaces, and odd line breaks?

See bookdesigntemplates.com for more on this and a free book construction manual from ALLi design advisor Joel Friedlander.

In her first brush with self-publishing, *USA Today* bestseller Helen Hollick was aghast to discover that her services provider had typeset her book in the font in which she'd written her draft, Comic Sans. Needless to say, she swiftly moved on to a more professional partner.

If you can answer yes, hand on heart, to all these questions, you

can present your book with professional pride. If not, you are not giving your book its best chance. All these things are within your control, but you must invest the necessary time and effort.

Look at It from the Bookseller's Perspective

Andrew Bromley, marketing manager at Ingram Spark (UK), one of the foremost publishing services and distributors, recommends asking yourself the following questions before approaching a bookstore:

- Why should a bookstore stock my book when they have limited space and a selection of millions in the market at 60 percent terms? Why do I or my book stand out?
- What margins am I prepared to give away? Should I sell 1,000 at a 30 percent margin or 2,000 at a 60 percent margin? Is it about money, or exposure for me, or both?
- Is my book likely to get some PR? Will the press or book media write a review or give it some feature coverage? For instance, does something controversial about it have links to something or somebody famous or change our views on a famous event, etc.?
- How else can I drive demand? Book signings, blogs, issue free chapters, book prizes, themed events, radio interviews, what else can I do...?
- Have I arranged distribution?

Distribution

Assuming your book is good enough to sit well on the shelves of a bricks-and-mortar store, now consider how you will get it there. If you have already arranged for your book to be listed by one of the major distributors used by bookshops, well and good. If not, you may find the practicalities and costs are prohibitive.

You will need to bear the cost of returns: bookstores always expect

to buy on a sale-or-return basis. Careful management and substantial confidence in your work is required to avoid a loss.

It's a matter of those two old business chestnuts: convenience and cost. Bookshops will buy a) where they can get the book most cheaply, with best margins for them, or b) where it's easiest to order. They don't want to bother with individual authors, or even small to medium publishers, hence they go to a distributor. Ingram supplies distributors like Gardners and Bertram. If you want to go global, you need to plug in with somebody who has global reach and can supply a bookstore with stock.

— ANDREW BROMLEY, INGRAM SPARK

If unable to order your book via its usual wholesaler, the bookstore will expect their financial arrangements with you to be the same as those with any of their trade-publisher partners: on a sale-or-return basis, and with next-day delivery in response to special orders. In every sale, the bookstore will expect to retain a handsome cut of the cover price, typically at least 40 percent. Don't expect them to buy your books by the case, because their storage space will be limited. Two or three copies at a time is not unusual. If they buy half a dozen, you have cause to celebrate.

After your initial delivery, it should be easy for the bookstore to buy more copies of your book, and to return them to you at no cost if they remain on the shelves unsold. The most likely solution is that you will have to make a personal trip to the store.

Bookstore chains will expect you to be able to supply copies of your book to ALL their stores, which may run into thousands of books, all printed at your expense. The scale of this up-front investment would preclude most indie authors on financial grounds, or at least make a contract

with a major bookstore seem less attractive. [And] the author needs to be wary about the returns issue. That would be fine for the occasional return, but could turn into an economic nightmare with multiple copies. Imagine if 100 bookshops all order 15 print copies on sale-or-return. The returns could wipe out your profits big time!

— HELEN HART, SILVERWOOD BOOKS

Distribution services are available to self-published authors, but at a substantial cost. IndieReader's IRIS service charges \$395 to add a new book to the IRIS catalogue. You'll need to sell a lot of books to recoup that outlay.

After taking all these factors into account, you may decide that having your book stocked in bricks-and-mortar bookstores is not quite as alluring as you first thought. There's no shame in that; only a fraction of trade-published books are stocked in each bookstore at any given time.

Think hard and objectively before making a commitment, and if you decide not to include bookstores in your marketing plan, that's fine. The freedom to choose is one of the joys of being a self-published author.

How to Make Your In-Store Pitch

If, after reading all these words of caution, you are still sold on the idea of getting your book stocked in bookstores, prepare your approach with the strategy and precision of a military campaign, and keep a clear head. Timing is everything.

In your enthusiasm, don't rush into your nearest store before you have a print copy of your book ready to show them. First, assemble your ammunition. Provide objective evidence to back up your claims for your book's worth: local media coverage, early reviews, and endorsements from appropriate authorities.

Then follow these steps:

- Pick the right store for your book, local to you and/or with a relevant specialist slant.
- Get to know your target bookstore and visit often, at different times of day.
- Identify the book's official buyer and then make an appointment at a time convenient to the buyer—and if it's not so convenient for you, too bad.
- Adopt the right tone—polite, professional, and respectful—and smile.
- Present an impassioned but rational pitch for your book to be sold in that particular shop.
- Provide professional materials in support, such as a book information sheet; copies of reviews; bookmarks, flyers, and business cards showing your author website URL, your social media sites, and any other relevant items (if you are unsure how to produce any of these, you'll find plenty of posts to help you in the ALLi Author Advice Centre blog).
- Demonstrate how stocking your book will benefit the store—how you will generate new customers (local fans, local interest, local media coverage, your online author platform, your social media activity, etc.).
- If the buyer doesn't make an immediate decision, show your own faith in your product by leaving a complimentary copy of the book for them to examine.
- Thank them for their time and leave promptly when you have finished your proposal.
- Don't hassle them for a response—there may be many factors affecting their decision that you don't know about.
- If you haven't heard anything from them after a week, put in a polite call or email, and await their reply.
- If the answer is a no, don't go back to collect your sample book unless they ask you to. Leave it with them in case they change their minds.

In all of these dealings, respect your contact's professional skill

and judgment. It is disappointing to have your book rejected, particularly by a store that you use regularly or that has a special significance for you, and especially if you know that store has been more receptive to other indie authors. Treat that last point as good news. It's far more hopeful for you long term than if the shop has a blanket policy to reject self-published books. They know their store and their customer base better than you ever will. If they remain unconvinced, accept their judgment with good grace. Try not to show disappointment or displeasure, and do not take it personally. You may want to return later, with the same or a different book, to pitch again.

If you believe they have made a mistake in rejecting your book, there is only one way to persuade them to make a different decision: Get back out there and sell your book elsewhere, then return another time with your next book, a proven track record, and an undaunted spirit.

In-Store Events

Assuming that you have successfully arranged for your book to be stocked in the store of your choice, try raising your game by offering author events. These need not be only launch events. Book signings, readings, demonstrations, or activities on appropriate occasions may all be considered if they offer a clear benefit to the bookstore, such as more customers, more sales, and more profit for the store.

Do not assume that any store will welcome a launch event by a debut, unknown, self-published author, any more than they would a debut, unknown, trade-published author. But if your first book has sold very well, and you're about to bring out a much-heralded sequel, you may see the money signs in the eyes of the store's buyer.

Incidentally, bear in mind that any bookshop hosting an in-store event for you will expect sales made to go through their tills and to gain their usual slice of your profit. Don't turn up with a box of books from your own stock and a petty cash tin, assuming you can bypass their system. Nor should you expect bookstore staff to treat you like a celebrity, unless you are confident that you'll generate a mile-long

queue of customers outside their door before they open. You need to generate that queue with your known local supporters. Don't rely on the bookstore to find an audience for you or you may end up speaking to an empty store. Aim for the highest number of guests you can muster. You'll need at least thirty positive responses to ensure a decent turnout, and hint as hard as you dare that they should not only attend but also consider buying your book at the event, whether for themselves or as gifts for friends and relations. Be grateful for whatever exposure the bookstore can offer you, and go in well equipped and mentally prepared to actively engage with customers, without harassing them.

Take props to provide a talking point. Military thriller writer Harvey Black brings a dummy of a man in uniform to sit beside him. Historical novelist Celia Boyd engaged a Civil War re-enactor to attend her latest book launch. Having a Roundhead in full costume in the audience added a talking point and a sense of excitement about the subject matter. Even a bowl of sweets to share on your signing table is, literally, a sweetener. If you have original illustrations or any other interesting source material, display them to encourage conversation and extend dwell-time at your table.

Above all, be generous with your time, and make every customer feel appreciated. Great feedback from happy customers, to whose book purchases you've added immeasurable value with special conversations and inscriptions, will persuade the bookstore to continue to support you and to invite you back for more.

Inspiring Successes

Many self-published authors have struck up excellent relationships by following the professional codes outlined above.

The first time I (Dan) went into a bookstore to ask if they'd be prepared to let me do a reading, I was more terrified than I would have been heading to the headteacher's office with the guilty chalk marks still on my fingers. I imagined that, like agents, they were approached constantly, had prepared speeches and stern glances

ready and waiting to bat away interfering upstart authors. At the very least I thought I'd have to find another store to do my regular browsing because I'd be sure to end up on a pasted-under-the-counter barred list.

As it turned out, the guy who owns the store, Oxford's the Albion Beatnik, is just a guy who loves books and quite likes selling them, too. There are lots of bookshops in Oxford where I live. There's even one of the most famous in the world, the original Blackwell's, but I write slightly off-beat stuff with lots of musical references whose natural readership is the kind of person who'd go to a rock gig on a Saturday night or hang out in a seedy jazz café. The Albion Beatnik specializes in books about music, and by and about the Beat Poets.

It's also a fantastic live music and culture venue, with a book café that plays jazz and is regularly open past midnight. So it was an obvious choice if I wanted to reach my readers.

In the three-and-a-half years since that first visit, I have held tons of events there, featuring poets from around Oxford, the UK, and even those visiting from overseas. These events have brought new customers to the store, and the store has brought new readers to my books.

This is the key to independent bookstores and independent authors working together: bringing something to each other. What we need to do, as self-publishers, is make sure that when we approach a bookstore we are clear exactly what we can bring to them.

Such success is not always premeditated. Rich rewards may be gained from opportunism. English novelist Roz Morris reports on the pleasing outcome of a serendipitous meeting in a pub:

A friend invited me to read my work at an event in a pub. It went well, and I got talking to someone from a bookshop. They said they happily stocked indie authors' books and offered to stock mine. I had no idea it could be that easy. Emboldened, I decided I'd approach the two independent bookshops in my part of London.

I didn't ask, "Do you stock self-published authors?" Although I

wanted to be up front, I thought that might come across as defensive. Instead, I asked, "Do you stock local authors?" In both shops, I showed my books and I was in. I realized that booksellers understand why authors self-publish. We simply have to go and say hello.

But then came... the special shop! The funny thing is, I didn't set out to sell to them at all. Barton's is an indie bookshop in Leatherhead, Surrey, and I sometimes shop there. I wandered into Barton's at Christmas, looking for books that friends and family wouldn't have found from online searching (what bookshops do best!). I chatted to the owner, Peter Snell, and we scooted around the shelves, hunting for treasure. I noticed he had a lot of books I already owned, so I'd say, "Have you got anything like this?" or "What do you think of that?"

Once I'd gathered a stack, I asked if he had any writing books, and then had to explain why I'd read everything he had. That led, without the slightest premeditation, to him looking me up and taking a fancy to my novel. I gave him a copy, and the next time I went in, he'd read it not just once, but twice, and said he wanted a word about my bizarre imagination.

Now when I drop in, he finds a way to mention to another customer that I have this rather interesting novel. The locals are usually impressed that they've met a real live author, and there's another sale! Barton's has been more than usually supportive of my work. They invited me for a signing, want me to do another when my next novel is ready, and my titles are displayed in a prominent position by the till.

Remember, too, what independent bookstores want. They want an eclectic stock so that they are a boutique alternative to supermarkets and Waterstones. Booksellers want to know about exciting, convention-bending work. And who's providing that? Indie authors.

— ROZ MORRIS

These examples demonstrate the natural synergy of free-thinking independent bookstores with self-published authors. There are impressive success stories in chain stores too, although it is more

difficult to gain a foothold in big chains, where you not only have to win over the local book buyer or store manager, but also conform to corporate policy from head office. But there are benefits. Store managers within a chain will talk to each other, enjoying a bit of rivalry and sharing best practice. If one has a good experience of a local self-published author, they may well recommend that author to their nearest neighboring store.

French resident Alison Morton maintains many friends and former colleagues in her home town of Tunbridge Wells, England. Careful negotiation, meticulous planning, professional presentation standards, and the guarantee of a large local audience of known supporters, as well as extensive before-and-after event publicity, have helped her to develop a strong relationship with the Tunbridge Wells branch of Waterstones, a leading British chain of booksellers, where she now holds launch events for each of her new novels. She also works effectively with bookstores local to her home in France.

ALLi's children's author advisor, Karen Inglis, has achieved distribution in ten branches of Waterstones through word-of-mouth recommendation from local branches with whom she'd developed a rapport. She advises that while local managers may not be allowed to order your book directly, they will have the power to recommend you to the central buyer if they think you have a quality product. Establishing your brand via a website is therefore very helpful, as it will enable managers to pass on your links. Karen shares her own sales history in more detail on her website here: kareninglis.wordpress.com/marketing-tips.

Any trade-published author and any bricks-and-mortar bookstore, whether indie or in a chain, would be proud to be a part of such success stories.

Supermarkets, Superstores, and Other Retail Outlets

Bookstores are not the only bricks-and-mortar shops in which readers buy books. Specialist stores often sell books, and supermarkets and superstores have now entered the fray. US novelist

Karen Myers reports on the effectiveness of special-interest stores relevant to the themes of her books:

My first series of books is not just regional (Virginia, USA) but also topical (foxhunting). It was straightforward to hit regional non-bookstore booksellers individually, the sort of people that supply horse and foxhunting enthusiasts, and also carry books. They've done very well for me.

— KAREN MYERS

Many authors may find new outlets through this kind of lateral thinking.

Sadly, there is no real potential for self-published books in supermarkets and superstores, whose entry into book retailing has been very selective. They are only interested in offering their customers a restricted list of bestsellers, often printed in special cut-price editions exclusively for the supermarket shelf, demanding different covers tailor made for their stores. As with their other product lines, these vast traders call the shots on price, paring the publisher's profit to the bone. No matter how well you think your book would match the customer profile of a particular supermarket chain, you are highly unlikely to secure a worthwhile deal.

It's worth bearing in mind that profit may not be the sole attraction for trade-publishers to get their books into supermarkets. Exposure to the millions of shoppers passing through the supermarket's doors each week will also be of value, particularly if the books currently on promotion in-store are by a prolific author with an extensive backlist available only at full price elsewhere. Supermarket book offers may, therefore, serve as loss leaders for top-selling authors. Self-published authors should steer a wide berth for now.

Remainder Outlets

Think of remainder outlets as the places where unsold books go to die. These stores get their books from trade-publishers' stock that boomerangs from bookstores that bought sale or return. After shipping both ways, and sitting on a shelf for months, to the trained eye they are not considered fit for resale at full price. They are let go, to cover their costs, via remainder outlets.

If that sounds a sad ending for the hard work of a trade-published author, that's not the worst potential outcome: trade-publishers are also unhesitating pulpsters. At least as a self-published author, you're unlikely to need to destroy your slow-selling books to create warehouse space for newcomers and rivals. Suddenly having a spare bedroom stacked high with boxes of unsold books doesn't feel so bad, although in these days of POD, you should not need to hold vast stocks at home.

Take heart, says bestselling American novelist Christine Nolfi, and know that for most indie authors, the real breakthrough to the big time will come not from bookstores at all, but from online retailing:

My books are mainstream women's fiction, the sort of thing bookstores prefer to stock, but I have no experience of getting into such venues. Early in my indie career, several successful authors advised me to focus on ebook sales if I wanted to earn a living. Approaching bookstores directly is an accounting nightmare.

— CHRISTINE NOLFI

Online Bookstores

In online retailing sites, there is less room for prejudice against self-published authors, largely because most customers neither notice nor care how a book is published. Their interest is essentially in whether a

book is their idea of a good read. Online retailing offers a much more even playing field on which the referee is the reader, not the retailer.

As in bricks-and-mortar bookstores, you need to behave professionally. In December 2013, a feature in *The Guardian* about the growing dominance of self-published ebooks in the Kindle charts provided the following summary of the even-handedness to publishers shown by Amazon, the leading online producer and distributor of self-published authors' books:

Amazon has been careful not to ghettoize self-published works, instead listing them with equal ranking alongside those from traditional houses, in a move that has irked some established publishers and led to calls for self-published works to be categorized separately.

The article goes on to quote Richard Mollet, chief executive of the UK Publishers' Association: "Publishing companies still offer authors unparalleled creative, financial, and marketing support and expertise, helping the author and the work achieve their full potential."

This seems a rather petulant and defensive response in the face of such clear evidence to the contrary.

To sell well online, it is essential that your book is attractive both editorially and visually. Both of these factors are well within the self-published author's power, as so many ALLi members ably demonstrate. Many trade-publishers admit that they have learned innovative marketing ideas from the indie sector.

Promotional Space

Although there are opportunities for high-spend book promotions on online retail sites (and plenty of online book promotion websites and services beyond the stores themselves, such as bookbub.com), the basic display space allocated to every book will be the same size and in the same format, whether it's the latest *New York Times* bestseller

sensation, or a book with no further readership likely than the author's own family and friends.

The visibility of your particular display space will vary according to the sales you make, thanks to the algorithms dictating that bestsellers are frequently recommended in "You Might Also Like" listings, but at least you have the same opportunity as any trade-published author to ensure your book is displayed to best effect. In fact, self-published authors have a clear advantage over trade-published authors, because they have control of their own book's profile. If you personally loaded your book onto Kobo, for example, it's very straightforward, and a moment's work, to tweak your book's online blurb, adding in the latest endorsement or adjusting the price so it fares better in the current marketplace.

Trade-published authors do not have direct access themselves but are dependent on their publisher's marketing team, whose priorities may lie elsewhere or be focused on the big money-spinning authors. For most books, the trade-publisher is unlikely to give the same amount of time and trouble as the average self-published author will to developing and updating online book data pages once the book has been launched.

To optimize your chance of sales online, pay careful attention to these core items of your book's online listing:

- book metadata
- book categories
- an enticing book description, appealingly laid out and search-engine optimized, aiding the reader to find it easily through Google and Amazon search engines
- an appealing author profile driving readers to your back catalogue, website, and social media pages.

The Importance of the Cover Thumbnail

Although with ebooks there is no spine or back cover to consider, nor choice of finish for the cover stock (even that of the paperback will

not, in any case, show up on the low resolution of the computer screen), the external appearance of the book is critical. The cover must be eye-catching, professional, legible (by title and author name), and suitable for its genre. Typically appearing alongside at least a half dozen other book covers, yours should hold its own and draw the reader in to find out more.

Ebook Interior

The interior of your book should be carefully formatted to be easily legible on every kind of ereader on which it may be read. As for print books, they should be error-free, correctly laid out, and thoroughly proofread to ensure they're free of typos, misplaced line breaks, and unexpected blank pages, and have correct navigation. If these issues are not attended to, it won't only be the bookstore proprietor who is on the receiving end of a reader's complaints—any comments will be there for the world to see, forever, on the review pages of the online retail site.

Once you have met all these criteria, you are on an even footing with trade-published authors. Sales then depend on the various online retailers' algorithms that work not on the basis of who has published your book, but on how closely it matches the needs and wants of the online retailers' customers. Personal booksellers' whims or likes are not the decider here: it's strictly down to statistical calculations via predetermined algorithms.

The exact workings of these algorithms are a closely guarded secret and driven, at least in part, by your sales success, so it's rather chicken and egg. Thus, any sales you can encourage, either regularly or in bursts, will help increase your book's visibility.

Your book's sales rank can and will change dramatically from day to day. Bear in mind that the rankings listed for your book on any online retailer's site will be relative to every other book's sales in their store. It is only a snapshot of where your book ranks at a specific moment, compared with all the other transactions conducted there.

Also remember that books are ranked by category, as well as

overall. In a category that applies to a narrow niche with few books, it's possible to become a number one bestseller, temporarily, by selling a single copy.

Don't waste time and energy checking the public-facing rankings. What really matters are the actual sales numbers relating to number of copies sold, rather than relative sales, visible only to you on your dashboard for your publisher account with the store.

But it's safe to assume that one important factor in determining how high your book will appear in any customer search within any online bookstore's website is the number and quality of reviews that readers have written about your book.

On that note, we will now turn our attention to the challenge of gaining reviews, both online and elsewhere.

REVIEWS, REVIEWERS, AND BOOK BLOGS

Ten years ago, if you asked authors or publishers about gaining book reviews, they would most likely have answered you in terms of traditional print media, *Publishers' Weekly*, the *Bookseller*, the *Literary Review*, the *New Yorker*, or the books supplements in the daily and weekend newspapers, radio, and, to a much lesser extent, TV.

These days, any discussion of book reviews is more likely to summon up a mental image of a screenshot, whether on Amazon, Goodreads, Kobo, or any number of blogs. Dwindling budgets in print publications and the online revolution means reader reviews, and those on dedicated blogs, are now central to most authors' careers.

Why Online Reviews Matter

There are many good reasons why online book reviews have become front of mind, and not all are positive:

- Research indicates they have a significant influence on readers' decisions to buy.

- They are very public, posted for all the world to see, and they don't go away.
- They are relatively accessible and democratic—anyone with an account for a particular online retail store, or with their own blog, may post a review without necessarily having to buy the book.
- They are controversial, especially since the so-called sock-puppet scandal in 2012, when it was revealed that certain authors and their publishers were posting fake negative reviews about rival books.
- They can be a source of anxiety due to the relative lack of—and inconsistent—policing, allowing an unfortunate amount of “trolling” (the deliberate sowing of negativity and discord) to slip through.
- More online reviews equals greater visibility within online stores and on search engines.

So online reviews are undoubtedly important. Do trade-published and self-published authors have equal chances of gaining such reviews?

How to Gain Online Reviews

Trade-publishers may work hard to gain new reviews for their book of the moment, engineering marketing campaigns and competitions to encourage new readers to review online. They may be able to commit a bigger marketing budget and have more established channels through which to encourage reviews, but they have no more power than the self-published author to ensure that customer reviews are published within online bookstores. Ultimately that decision lies with the reader.

It therefore follows that the best way to get more online reviews is to a) publish the best books that you can, and b) build strong relationships with readers to motivate them to show their support for you in whatever way they can, so not only to buy every book you

write, but also to post reviews and make word-of-mouth recommendations.

Make it a mission to motivate your readers to respond with reviews. Do not miss a trick. It will not cost you any money. Most ethical authors would in any case reject the idea of paying for reviews. All it takes is some lateral thinking, a positive attitude, a determined approach, and some work and application. These tools are within the reach of all authors.

Who Dares, Wins

Firstly, ask. Catch your readers' attention at the time when they are most receptive to a request to post a review, usually immediately after reading your book.

Include at the end of your books a simple, polite request explaining that you would be very grateful for online feedback. This is particularly easy for ebooks, where you can include an embedded link in the back matter (and perhaps the front matter too) to take the reader directly to the reviews page on Amazon, Kobo, Nook, or wherever the book was bought.

Many readers are not aware how grateful authors are for online reviews. Yet why should they be expected to know this? Their lives, unlike yours, are not engrossed in the world of publishing and bookselling. If they've enjoyed your book, though, they will almost certainly feel some gratitude toward you, and they may be glad of the opportunity to interact with you in this way.

Not all readers are confident writers, however, and for many the prospect of writing a book review will fill them with horror and nervous memories of schoolroom challenges and failures. Phrase your request such that it is clear you are not asking for a weighty literary appraisal, just a few words that reflect your readers' personal appreciation. (At the time of writing, Amazon's minimum word count for a book review is a mere twenty words.) Encourage your readers, make the task as easy as possible for them, and don't forget to thank them.

Making It Easy

Change the message according to the store in which you are selling your ebook, by modifying your ebook to upload an appropriate version in each online store. Link to Kobo in the version you sell in the Kobo store, iBooks in the iBooks store, and so on. If selling via Amazon, you might consider reminding the reader that there are different Amazon territories, which they might not realize, each carrying separate review sites, although it's unrealistic to expect a reader to post a review worldwide in all the different geographical areas. It's usually only other writers who are motivated enough to post their reviews on the same site across multiple territories.

At the end of a print book, you might consider listing all the online sites on which you'd welcome a review, so that the readers may take their pick.

The main point is to give this some thought. Where do you want the review to go? Take the appropriate action.

Avoid This Pitfall

A cautionary note here on one particular means that some self-published authors have used to try to attract more sales and online reviews: free giveaways that promote the books to inappropriate audiences. This might encourage readers who would not normally buy your book to download, and the additional downloads may help to boost your book's ranking, at least temporarily, but it's a calculated risk. Bad reviews are more likely from readers who are disappointed with their freebie, not because there's anything wrong with the read, but because it doesn't match their normal reading choice.

As in most things, on the reviewing front, less is often more. Better to have ten five-star reviews than fifty one-star ratings!

What's Right for You

If reading this last section has made you feel uncomfortable, don't worry. If you don't want to ask for reviews that way, you don't have to. Some authors prefer to leave it to readers to make up their own minds, on the basis that seasoned reviewers will always post, whereas those who never do will be made to feel bad if pressured, or, operating beyond their comfort zone, may write an unhelpful or incompetent review.

As with all aspects of being indie, the choice is yours. There are always other ways.

Invite Top Reviewers

Another tactic equally open to self-published and trade-published authors is to identify and approach top Amazon reviewers with an invitation to receive a free copy of your book in return for an honest review. As a high-ranking reviewer on Amazon UK, I am approached two or three times a week by authors offering me their books, and these are almost always self-published authors.

From where I'm standing, it seems to me that trade-publishers are missing a trick here, and the self-publishers are showing more initiative and bravado, although they aren't always entirely professional in their approach. One author recently told me she "expected" a review if she was going to "gift" me an ecopy of her new full-length novel, which had a retail value of just 99 pence and only one previous review by someone with the same surname as the author.

I was not flattered that she apparently valued my time at around 20 pence per hour. I declined her offer.

Just as any trade-publishing company might do, trawl through the list of the top reviewers who read books in the relevant genre and approach them with a polite, professional offer. Before approaching them, read their public profiles to check whether they welcome such

offers. There's no point wasting your time, and theirs, if they have closed their lists.

Generally, if reviewers make their email addresses publicly available, it means they're willing to be approached. However, do not assume that you have a right to their time, any more than you have a right to a spot on a bookshop's shelf, simply by dint of having published a book.

In general, book reviewers make no financial gain from their activity, except perhaps a tiny amount from posting affiliate marketing links to the books they have reviewed on their website. They generally write reviews for personal satisfaction. If they review your book, they are doing you a huge favor, giving up usually around three or four hours to read your book and at least another hour to write a considered review.

Actively approaching a reviewer in this way is considered perfectly ethical and acceptable behavior by Amazon, other authors, reviewers, and readers. Just as when approaching a bookshop, behave professionally, openly, and helpfully, making a case for why this particular person should read and review your book.

Wait patiently for their response. Do not pressure them or impose a deadline, and if they do review your book, whatever their verdict, thank them politely.

Amazon's rules on reviewing have recently tightened up to deter sellers who used to employ whole armies of reviewers to post free, positive reviews in return for a free product. At time of writing this does not apply to books.

However, the rules clearly state that: "Authors are welcome to submit Customer Reviews, unless the reviewing author has a personal relationship with the author of the book being reviewed, or was involved in the book's creation process (i.e. as a co-author, editor, illustrator, etc.). If so, that author isn't eligible to write a Customer Review for that book."

For more frequently asked questions from authors about Amazon rules for reviews see: [amazon.com/gp/community-help/customer-review-guidelines-faqs-from-authors](https://www.amazon.com/gp/community-help/customer-review-guidelines-faqs-from-authors).

For more insight into this area of activity, where so many self-published authors fear to tread or tread awkwardly and come away jaded by their experience, read this interview with ALLi author Theo Rogers about Amazon reviewers: selfpublishingadvice.org/blog/why-indie-authors-need-to-understand-the-subculture-of-amazon-reviewers.

Spread the Word

When you receive a great review, spread the word via social media. Tweet a link, post it on Facebook or Google+, or whichever site you prefer, to hint to other readers that they may like to follow suit. Success breeds success.

When you receive a bad review, the only appropriate response is silence. No matter how ridiculous or undeserved the review, rise above it, and remain professional. Responding with a defensive retort or rallying your friends to defend your book on your behalf is the hallmark of an inexperienced author who does not understand the etiquette of the marketplace. Keep your gaze high, and disregard any slight.

If the poor review is truly unjust and undeserved, discerning readers will spot its flaws without any assistance, just as most people can see straight through the gushing praise of a book written by the author's best friend.

You have little control over reviews posted online other than to request removal of any that are defamatory or clearly inappropriate, if it's clear the reviewer hasn't read the book but is complaining about a delivery delay or other grievance, or the review is offensive. Concentrate on the positive.

There are ways in which you can make these reviews work harder for you. First, there currently exists (though it may not remain forever) the option on Amazon to vote a review helpful or unhelpful. Some marketers advise you to rally your friends and supporters to vote more favorable reviews helpful, so that the less favorable reviews are pushed down the page, keeping the best ones at the top. Whether

you do this or not is down to your own conscience. I (Debbie) don't, as I personally dislike this kind of popularity poll, which smacks to me of desperation as well as a disregard for the ability of the average site visitor to judge reviews on their own merit. But that's just my view.

Quote favorable reviews in your marketing materials, on your author website, or as endorsements on future publications. They are also very useful when promoting your book elsewhere, for example when trying to get it stocked in a bricks-and-mortar store, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Even though discerning people will recognize that all good reviews are objective, it's certainly helpful to be able to cite plenty of online stars as social proof of your book's worth.

Engage with Goodreads

One excellent free opportunity to engage with social media specific to readers is Goodreads. Many authors swear by Goodreads as a great place for writers to bond with readers and share book recommendations and discussions, and it's yet another place to solicit reviews.

Goodreads tends to divide authors; they either love it or hate it. Although now owned by Amazon, its rules and standards are different from Amazon's. A reviewer writing about the same book on both sites will generally give one fewer star on Goodreads than on Amazon due to the different keys for their respective star systems.

There are also all kinds of lists and polls, which some enjoy and others abhor. Getting your book voted onto a list in a particular category is a great way to gain exposure before an audience for its genre, but it might also be regarded as a popularity poll to see who can engage the most friends. The practice results in some dubious rankings where books by living authors are placed above classical authors who, long dead, can't mobilize their fans to take part.

Apple iBooks

When authors talk about getting book reviews, too often they focus only on Amazon, but Apple iBooks also encourages and rewards reader reviews.

As part of the process of publishing, each of your books available on iBooks has a maximum of 250 promo codes you can use to distribute to reviewers, bloggers, and other PR and media contacts. With a promo code, they can download your book at no cost. By using these review codes as iBooks advises, your books show up with higher ratings in the Apple store, increasing your book's sales and visibility.

To obtain the codes for your ebook, click the "My Books" tab and select the book you would like to get codes for. Click "Promo Codes" and enter the number of codes you would like to download. You then receive an email with the codes and code redemption instructions to provide to each person that you send the codes to, including certain wording you must use when giving the codes to your readers.

Once you've obtained the codes, give them out as quickly as possible because they expire within a month.

It is worth taking time to ask your reader fans who love your work and want you to succeed to post a modified version of their Amazon review on iBooks.

Book Blogs

Online retail websites and social networks are not the only source of book reviews. Book bloggers can be trusted sources of recommendations for readers. These may be run by individuals who enjoy reading and reviewing, who sometimes gain financial rewards via affiliate links promoting the books they review, but most book blogs are without profit motives, or produced by groups with a specific purpose, such as quality-assurance sites.

A growing number of readers follow book bloggers who match their own particular tastes as a simple way of finding new books they

are likely to enjoy. Many readers come to regard book bloggers as trusted friends with similar tastes.

This trust gives book bloggers considerable power. Not surprisingly, book bloggers often find themselves sinking under the weight of advance review copies (ARCs) from publishers who recognize that, because of their specialist readership, they are the most effective medium for reaching specific audiences.

The better and more influential a book blogger, the more likely they are to be busy. Some book bloggers choose to reduce their load by refusing to review self-published books. Their situation is analogous to that of the bookstore proprietor who considered trade-publishing as a seal of approval and quality control. If they have to reduce their to-read pile, that's one easy way to do so.

Your challenge, therefore, as with pitching your book to bookstores and to top Amazon reviewers, is to customize your pitch to match the blogger's aims, to convince them that they will love your book—and so will their readers.

The author of the influential *Gav Reads* blog gave the following reasons as to why a reviewer might choose not to read or review your book:

- We don't know who you are.
- We don't know how you'll react.
- We'll feel guilty when we don't read it.
- We know you're not going to generate hits.
- We don't read cute bunny love stories set in Ancient Rome.
- We know it's going to be rubbish.

His position is similar to booksellers who have been burned by badly self-published books. Not all book bloggers will be so explicit or feel so strongly, especially if they have had good experiences of self-published books in the past. However, any self-published author who is pitching a book to a blogger would be well advised to anticipate and be prepared to subvert these sorts of potential objections.

Mainstream Media Reviews

Even with the high profile and volume of online reviews and book blogs, where all kinds of authors meet on a relatively equal footing, many self-published authors desire the more traditional kind of review in mainstream cultural media.

There is no doubt that 2012 was a breakthrough year for mainstream media coverage of self-published authors. In 2011 there were interested columns on the stories of John Locke's and Amanda Hocking's success, but in 2012, that coverage started, in the very smallest way, to cross into the review columns. Two books that crossed over from self-publishing to the mainstream (to both commercial and critical acclaim), Hugh Howey's *Wool* and Sergio De La Pava's *A Naked Singularity*, helped fly the flag for self-published authors.

And, of course, at the commercial rather than literary end of the spectrum, 2012 will forever be the year of that other crossover phenomenon, *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Another key moment was the favorable review of Alan Sepinwall's *The Revolution Was Televised* by legendary sharp-penned critic Michiko Kakutani, in the *New York Times*.

Mainstream reviews of self-published books are now more likely, but generally only after they have become big sellers. So this is the place to target after your book has proven itself as a phenomenon, not when it's newly published, and you're still reaching out to your first readers.

These works have shown that self-published books can hold their own on the review pages and can attract mass sales and readership. It's an encouraging indicator that high-profile platforms are starting to look less at where books come from and more at what lies between their covers.

However, writers of mainstream book pages will, like the bloggers, be inundated with ARCs and appeals from trade-publishing houses that are also likely to be big-budget advertisers and therefore have great clout. Self-published authors, on such small budgets they have to

think twice about whether they can even afford to dispatch a complimentary copy of their book, simply cannot compete.

Don't send a print review copy unless it has specifically been requested. It will almost certainly be disposed of unread.

Alternative Editorial

Although it's disheartening for the self-published author to feel relatively invisible, there is no need to despair: book review pages are not the only means by which to gain mainstream coverage of a book. Delve beyond the Books or Arts or Culture sections of any major paper to find the feature pages, the editorials, and the talking-point sections. Here are opportunities to connect with a much wider range of readers.

When a book makes this crossover, readers of the article stop thinking about it simply as a book and start seeing it as essential further reading about questions that are central to their lives. This approach works particularly well for nonfiction or, in fiction, for high-concept books and books with unusual themes or approaches.

Self-published books, being free of the bounds and conservatism of trade-publishing houses, might be seen as the natural home of more thought-provoking topics and therefore the first place that feature editors would be advised to look for such material. But these editors may not yet realize this, so the self-published author with a story to tell and an unusual angle to offer should actively seek opportunities, clearly spelling out the news angle or feature idea to the appropriate section editor.

Start Small

Another approach is to start by aiming closer to home, gaining coverage and a reputation with regional media, print, TV, or, more likely, radio, where there is an ongoing need for locally available commentators and experts and generally a much smaller staff than on national media. Approaching your local paper or lifestyle magazine is

usually more affordable and practical for the self-published author than competing for the top national spots, and may also translate into higher sales and readership of your book, because local audiences tend to feel more ownership and connection.

Gaining a local reputation helps build clips, collateral, and credibility for approaching national media farther down the line.

To increase your chance of having your book accepted for a review, blog, or media feature, always include in your application these things:

- your credentials as a high-quality author (e.g. your author website, previous media coverage, awards, and bestsellers)
- existing positive reviews
- evidence of how you will drive traffic to the blog or review outlet through your social media following
- a professional information sheet about your book, showing title, jacket, and other important metadata, a summary, and any relevant review quotes or author information.

Another potentially important player in raising your profile and reaching new readers is the library system. The next chapter will help you play your (library) card right for maximum benefit.

LIBRARIES

Of all the segments of the book trade examined by this book, the library sector is, anecdotally, the most encouraging for the self-publishing author. Librarians love books, and most of them love writers too. Most are very sympathetic to authors. Some are even authors themselves. If a writer can demonstrate a good track record and a demand for a book, an acquiring librarian will generally give it a fair hearing.

More than 10 percent of publishers' net book sales are to libraries, so there is undoubtedly scope here for the author-publisher too. A search of WorldCat, the outward-facing catalogue of the library system, reveals that titles published by KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing), Smashwords, CreateSpace, and Ingram (Lightning Source and IngramSpark) are all available in libraries, so some librarians are clearly buying self-published books that fit their acquisitions guidelines.

Unlike bookstores, where purchases are often dictated by a head office, libraries operate independently. Each library operates its own policy, and stock is either ordered from catalogues or by its chosen book supplier based on its community profile. Each library has its own budget that it can spend as it wants, within broad parameters.

How Libraries Work

It's easy to obtain a list of libraries through your country's library association. You need to recognize that there are four kinds of library: public, academic, school, and special. Each has a different purpose and orders different kinds of books as follows:

- **Public:** Government-funded local and national libraries serve the general public.
- **Academic:** The college and university library market, although relatively smaller, usually has more money than the public sector to spend on books.
- **School:** Although having a smaller budget than public or academic libraries, school libraries are important for children's or YA (young adult) writers.
- **Special:** Corporate libraries, usually privately run, are devoted to specific purposes, such as medical or law, with budgets from tiny to huge—significant for niche writers.

The book world has developed a system to serve the special needs of librarians, and in most countries, libraries have their own tailor-made distribution companies that accommodate trade-publishers. Understanding how this book-buying system works will help you gain a foothold in it.

There are different distributors to consider in different countries, but here's an example of those in the US:

- Quality Books Inc.: quality-books.com/
- Unique Books Inc.: uniquebooksinc.com/
- Baker & Taylor: baker-taylor.com/ (technically this is a wholesaler, but it can also help you access the library market)
- Overdrive: overdrive.com for ebooks, audiobooks, and videos.

Libraries will generally buy hardback and trade books and tend to shy away from mass-market paperbacks, though there are exceptions. Ebooks are increasingly popular.

Libraries are keen to offer self-published books, but with over 600,000 indie titles published every year in the US alone, librarians don't have the time or resources to filter the good from the bad.

Librarians also face tight budgetary constraints. Traditionally, mainstream publishers have sold print copies to libraries at a high markup (often five to ten times the price paid by consumers). After the book is checked out twenty or thirty times, it may need to be replaced. Absurdly, this print model has been carried over into the digital age, with Digital Rights Management (DRM) installed in the ebooks purchased by libraries, which both limits the number of individual checkouts and requires a "copy" to be repurchased after an overall number of loans or a preset period.

The "Big Five" trade-publishers have been ambivalent about ebook lending in libraries, in many cases holding back for fear of the ease of copying and piracy. This leaves more room for self-published authors to get in on the ebook action in libraries.

In our guidebook *Choosing the Best Self-Publishing Companies and Services*, we look at some of the many services now stepping up to provide a link between your publishing platform and the ebook library infrastructure—mostly in the US, where there are thousands of libraries with the facility to lend ebooks. We particularly focus on the three major services that connect independent authors to the ebook library system: ebooksareforever, SELF-e, and OverDrive.

All these services are operating in an emergent sector, and so there is no perfect system.

The current routes for access to libraries are more about visibility than bank balance. For genre authors in particular, finding a way into the library system can be very worthwhile. Romance is the hottest circulating category of ebooks for public libraries, and authors do not have to be known quantities to get circulated widely.

Romance readers are voracious, but libraries' demand for ebooks in all genres is large and growing, and we need to find a way to meet

it. At the moment, there isn't a huge amount of money in the library market, but smart authors should select a solution they're comfortable with and use it as part of a longer game of profile-raising.

"Library patrons do purchase books," says Smashwords' Mark Coker. "That's because libraries are engines of discovery."

Preparing Your Approach

You can't count on walking into a library and having them take your book, not even if you're giving it away. Librarians are happy to get the right books for their readers, but they have constraints on what books they can accept and policies on what they can and cannot buy. The high cost of storage and distribution is a practical limitation, and just as in bookstores, shelf space and time are also limited.

Librarians are busy people with little time to read about new books, so it's up to you to identify which librarians would be most likely to buy your book and how to get them interested.

Librarians need to believe your book is something their readers will want to read. Before you make an approach, have an information sheet that makes it clear at which readership your book is directed, listing comparable titles.

As always, in terms of drawing attention to your book, being able to produce published book reviews will increase your credibility as an author. Librarians generally rely on vendor lists, where self-published authors rarely appear, or on pre-publication book reviews in trade magazines such as *Publishers Weekly* (USA) and the *Bookseller* (UK), or specific library trade magazines like *Library Journal*, *Booklist*, *Choice*, and *Forecast*.

School Library Journal is an offshoot of *Library Journal* that specializes in children's and YA books. There are also review magazines, online and print, that are specific to genres, such as *RT Book Review* (romance) and *Locus Magazine* (science fiction and fantasy). The librarian who is specifically interested in indie books may consult *IndieReader*.

Kirkus and *PW Select* allow self-publishing authors to pay for a

review. This fee rightly doesn't guarantee a good review, and neither is it cheap. *PW Select* is viewed by some librarians as a kind of ghetto and not worth the read.

An alternative to reviews is to run events and build local popularity. Librarians, in the main, like to stock books of local interest, so if you're doing a lot of local events, talks, or speaking gigs, or have some press, TV, or radio coverage coming up, let your local libraries know. Alert your library in advance to give staff sufficient time to order your book.

These two case studies from ALLi members illustrate the value of a local link. First, novelist Jan Ruth, writing in Wales:

Overall, the Welsh libraries were well down on my list of possible outlets with regard to selling or even stocking my books. I had no idea how it might work, and it was entirely by chance that I walked into my local library and met the head buyer. We enjoyed an informal, unplanned chat.

I left a couple of paperbacks with her so she could peruse the actual product. By the time I'd driven home and logged on to my email, there was a request that I supply 48 books, a dozen copies of each title, and an invitation to be a guest speaker at Conwy Library on World Book Day.

Of course, the fact that these novels are set in well-known Welsh towns and locations has clearly helped my cause, but her very first remark to me was that she loved the covers! Yet more confirmation that people do judge books by their covers, at least initially. It has been a challenge to design covers that work as thumbnails around the internet and look equally good transferred to paperback, but this is clearly well worth the time and investment.

— JAN RUTH

English writer Katharine D'Souza also values links with her local library:

I'm a huge fan of libraries because they fed my endless appetite for new stories when I was an eager reader as a child. I wouldn't be the person I am now, let alone the writer I am, if it weren't for such easy access to so many books. Now I am a writer, I want to give something back.

Both of my novels are set in Birmingham and, because the setting is integral to each story, I'm eager for the books to reach as many Brummies as possible. I got in touch with the reader development team for Birmingham Libraries and asked if I could tell them about my books.

The reception I got was brilliant. My details went to all the community libraries, and I suddenly found I had a book tour in place! Some library visits were to speak to an existing group, others were specially arranged author events. In all cases I was made extremely welcome by the library staff and met by a group of interested people. Sometimes it was an intimate chat with a small group of readers, other times I spoke for longer to a larger audience. Every time was great fun. Not only did I meet people who were interested in my books—either having read the library copy or keen to buy one from me—but I also got to interact with avid readers and pick their brains about what kind of stories they enjoy, what kind they'd like to read.

I'm looking forward to the visits I still have lined up and hope Birmingham Libraries will be interested in my next book so I can visit again when it's out.

— KATHARINE D'SOUZA

Once you've made initial sales to a few local libraries, it is much easier to sell to others and to different kinds of libraries too, so don't stop at your first success story. Expand your territory.

One small practical detail: ensure your book has an ISBN. Without it, as far as the library system is concerned, your book doesn't exist.

Making Your Approach

To make the most of the opportunities libraries offer, now and in the future, nothing is more important than making the librarians aware of your book and its merits. Dust down your library card, stop by, and introduce yourself. The librarian who purchases books is usually the acquisitions librarian or the person in charge of the collection development. Sometimes there are several, each with responsibilities for particular categories. The person who acquires travel books, for example, may be different from the person who acquires literature or genre fiction.

Check the website. If your book is a children's book, the person you want is likely to be head of the children's department or youth services. Each library may have a collection development policy that gives a broad outline of what it collects and whether it buys books or has them donated.

Discover what books the library buys, and talk to the librarians about how they make purchases, their time frames, and so on. As in bookshops, build relationships. Some libraries have special systems or sections specifically for self-published local authors.

As always, be polite, professional, and respectful. Call, email, or set up a brief meeting to ask about donating some copies of your books. Yes, donating. Libraries are usually nonprofit organizations and, at the moment, are under funding pressure. They like and need donations, so in most cases you should be willing to donate.

A lot of libraries prefer two copies of a book or more. Cataloging even a fiction book takes time and effort, and many libraries find it makes more economic sense to have at least two copies.

If pitching your book doesn't work, ask about staging an event, or find another way you can fill a need for them. An event is a great way to get into your local library, become acquainted with the staff, and meet local readers. Many libraries also have reading groups that might love to have you visit as a guest author.

For children's author Karen Inglis, this tactic served as a springboard:

I did a children's event at my local library, which was a good way to get exposure. I recently discovered that one of my books subsequently had 72 library borrows.

— KAREN INGLIS

Asking others to request your book can get a library to put your book on the shelves. Libraries usually take requests seriously, but they are also well trained in detecting when such requests are genuine. So don't ring up pretending to be a reader. Ask people who have a genuine enthusiasm for your book to make the request.

Once the Book Is Stocked

If your book is borrowed regularly, the librarian may be happy to pay for additional copies. If seldom or never borrowed, your book may not last. How long a book stays on the shelf depends on the library's available space, how often the book is checked out, and also on the book's condition.

Books last longer at central libraries that have a larger and more comprehensive collection; branches are smaller buildings, and their collections are supposed to be popular. That's what they're for, bringing popular books to the general public. So books, especially novels, tend to be weeded out from branch libraries after a year or so if they are not circulating. That's why you sometimes see libraries selling off books that are apparently still in good condition: there simply haven't been enough loans to justify giving them shelf space.

All other things being equal, paperbacks circulate better than hardcovers, and hardcovers with dust jackets better than hardcovers without.

Is there anything authors can do to improve the chances that your books will be found and checked out more often? As always, your cover art is important. Enticing descriptions on the side of the dust

jacket, or the front and back of the paperback, will encourage more borrows.

Let the librarians know about all the marketing you are doing, including email promotions and in-store events. The library wants to know that the author is heavily invested in the book's success.

If your library has any kind of book blog or feature on its website, offer to contribute, or have someone post a review or make a book recommendation. If you have local fans, encourage them to get involved. Urge local social media followers and email-list subscribers to ask about your book next time they are in the library, perhaps offering some kind of incentive.

If you hadn't already offered to hold an event before the library agreed to stock your book, do so now, whether for the general public or as part of one of their regular book groups or reading groups. Scottish novelist Ali Bacon suggests:

Don't confine yourself to purely promotional events. Find out what kind of thing the library would like to provide for users and work out what you could offer to help them. My local council area runs an annual Discover Festival for people to do new things or learn new skills, where I ran a workshop.

— ALI BACON

Teaming up with other authors to provide a joint event can add appeal to your local library. Ali joined forces with the nine other authors in the writers' cooperative Bristol Women Writers to produce *Unchained*, an anthology of their short stories and poems, published to mark Bristol Central Library's 400th anniversary. Launched as part of the Bristol Literature Festival 2013, it led on to a writing workshop as part of the Bristol 400 program.

Our group now has a much higher profile, and Bristol Libraries welcome our suggestions for events and activities. It has also given me exposure over a wider area than before and has given all of us enriched networking opportunities with other writing groups, publishers, editors, and performers. The library tie-in was definitely important in catching attention and giving off good vibes—writers and readers all love libraries!

I made the first approach to the libraries, but after a couple of events they started coming to me. I also appeared on local radio during National Libraries Week as a result of library events and contacts. Although I originally offered free copies of my novel, since then the libraries staging events have usually bought copies of whichever book is being promoted.

— ALI BACON

Just like bookstores, librarians are effectively hand-selling books. Think of them as ambassadors for your book, quietly but effectively spreading your words to the wider world. Librarians not only help library members find suitable books, they also discuss with each other what they are reading, and the books they read and recommend circulate more.

American businessman Mitchell Davis, founder of BookSurge, which was later acquired by Amazon and turned into CreateSpace, now offers the book world a new service, BiblioBoard, which he describes as “the patron-first mobile library.” Davis believes libraries can reinvent themselves in a new publishing landscape as a useful discovery service:

So far, the patterns of what propels some self-published books to break out have been mostly haphazard. Libraries can change that... [and] help

patrons make sense of it all. In the process, they can reinvent themselves in the value chain and provide a critical reader service.

Libraries have struggled to participate in the digital era while stuck in one-book, one-user business models established by publishers...[but] as curation meets new technology and business models afforded by BiblioBoard, libraries can make available thousands of fantastic ebooks and be adding new titles all the time.

Since this is provided to libraries and patrons as a book discovery service (not a sale of content at typical ebook prices), it will be affordable for all libraries and able to scale to fit any library budget... with no checkouts, returns or multi-user limits. The initiative can go viral and serve millions of patrons without creating wait lists or unchecked demand-driven acquisition spending. Patrons will find books that resonate, and they will tell others, and this will drive a new readership base for that author.

— MITCHELL DAVIS

Davis anticipates that soon, in terms of book discovery, “libraries and their patrons will be better at publishing than the big publishers.” You can read more on Mitch’s ideas at pubsmartcon.com/libraries-patrons-can-beat-publishers-publishing.

Other Ways of Earning Income within Libraries

If you find the only way to get your book into libraries is to donate copies, do not be downhearted or deterred. There are other ways to benefit, financially and otherwise, from having your books there:

- **Earnings:** Register for Public Lending Rights (PLR), which accrue from borrows over time.
- **Exposure:** Your book is being displayed on equal terms alongside trade-published works (and the average borrower will not know the difference).

- **Book discovery:** Borrowers may review and recommend your books, helping you reach more readers.

To be eligible for PLR payments, you will need to register with the appropriate organization that covers your country's lending system.

Joining your country's equivalent of the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) is also highly recommended, as this organization distributes to authors any rights income gained from various uses of published work, such as photocopying. Again, the benefit isn't only financial:

An author's income is usually small, and the fees paid out by PLR and ALCS are always welcome. Membership of ALCS and being registered for PLR have both increased my income. But I also appreciate knowing how many people are borrowing my books in libraries. I'm also reassured to know that ALCS—for a lifetime fee of £25 in the UK—will protect and promote the rights of authors writing in all disciplines, ensuring we get fair payment for the various uses of our work.

— LINDA GILLARD

Working closely and strategically with your local library can clearly help you raise your profile locally and then further afield as your reputation spreads:

My involvement with libraries has definitely raised my profile locally. Although audiences were fairly modest, some of the events were covered in local papers which also helped spread the word. One press contact came through my local library.

— ALI BACON

Another great local opportunity to raise your profile that seems to be on almost everybody's doorstep these days is the literary or cultural festival, which may or may not also involve local libraries. The next chapter will address the growing opportunities for self-published authors to raise their profile alongside trade-publishers at festivals.

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Festival culture is proliferating throughout the arts. There seems just now to be an endless appetite for literature festivals. Alongside the longest-established, biggest, and best-known events, there are more small, local, and/or niche events springing up, each offering their own unique flavor to provide book lovers with ever-increasing choices.

All these festivals have at their center authors of every variety, from cerebral academic to celebrity autobiographer. Unless a festival is aiming at a narrow niche or genre, there is often room for both, and everything in between. The reader is spoiled for choice.

Keeping Up with the Times

As the profile of self-publishing grows, it seems reasonable that literature festivals should include self-published authors. Many festival organizers are beginning to do this, albeit tentatively. The minimum entry level seems to be an information session explaining the concept of this new publishing phenomenon. Including talks about self-publishing is often a commercially sound move for a festival, demonstrating to the audience, and potential sponsors, that

the festival is moving with the times and addressing the latest publishing trends.

Although not as inclusive as inviting self-published authors to join the mainstream event program, such talks do at least acknowledge their existence and bode well for future developments and collaborations. Any festival organizer wishing to remain credible could no more ignore the rise of self-publishing than the proliferation of ereaders. Yet self-published authors are generally underrepresented or even excluded at literature festivals. Unfortunately, even those organizers with the best intentions toward self-published authors sometimes come unstuck.

One example is the prestigious Boston Book Festival, which in 2013 promised a new “Indie Alley” dedicating thirty stands specifically to self-published authors. In practice, the result was disappointing, as local author Christine Frost described on the ALLi blog, before sharing some constructive suggestions for better collaboration in future:

Unfortunately, it did not go well. The printed program offered little enlightenment about Indie Alley or its precise location. The venue map showcased traditional publishers and literary organizations in their usual spots. Rather than include Indie Alley in the exhibitor list, it appeared as a pale orange ad toward the back of the program. No signs directed attendees to it. I traversed the perimeter of the festival, eager to see fellow indie authors, and eventually gave up in favor of not missing out on the dozens of readings and panel sessions to choose from.

The Boston Book Festival is comprised of two full-time and one-part-time staff, and relies on a small army of volunteers. I was told the amount of extra effort to coordinate Indie Alley proved to be too much in the face of the increased phone calls and emails in addition to the unhappiness that was felt on all sides of it. Ultimately, I was told, they can't be all things to all people, and independent authors should organize their own event.

I was disappointed that it was deemed such a failure. Lessons were

certainly to be learned on both sides. Better strategy would have made Indie Alley more visible. The follow-up conversation might have been more constructive, with indies offering more collaborative solutions perhaps to help organize their own space at the event in the future.

While BBF organizers solidly shut down the idea of trying to incorporate self-published authors again after this experience, I'm hoping that eventually there can be a chance to revisit this to make it a more positive experience for everyone. With ever more authors turning to self-publishing, there is a host of opportunities to showcase the wealth of talent, innovation, and experience indie authors offer, through exhibits and panel discussions, and there would be plenty of interest among the attendees of this great Boston tradition.

— CHRISTINE FROST

This is just one example of a major literature festival at which the growing and important sector of self-publishing was sidelined or ignored.

On reading of Christine Frost's experience at the Boston Book Festival, self-published author Warren Shuman commented:

I am not surprised at your unfortunate experience. I have seen the same sort of ignorance at other book fairs... These once-a-year so-called book experts really do not keep up with the huge changes in the digital book world. It's not only bad for us, it's cheating the attendees as well.

— WARREN SHUMAN

The Festival Organizer's Challenges

Clearly, any self-published authors hoping to play a part in literature

festivals need to be mindful of the challenges and constraints facing festival organizers and to accommodate and work around them. Engineering these large and varied events is a complex and stressful job, requiring logistical calculations, extensive year-round publicity, and massive investment. Before considering how self-published authors may get in on their action, it's worth getting some perspective on how festival organizers operate.

Their brief is to secure an appealing program to a pre-ordained budget, and to optimize ticket sales against a meticulously timed schedule, while satisfying both sponsors and audiences that they're getting excellent value for money. For festivals that run annually, a model to which most will aspire, each year's program must be varied, topical, appealing, and newsworthy.

The guest authors must be dependable, presentable, entertaining, and safe, and sufficiently appealing to the public to sell books in good numbers from the inevitable festival bookshop, usually a pop-up run by local traders that may be the nearest chain's branch or a local independent trying to serve hundreds of customers simultaneously and swiftly so that they're on time for their next events.

The festival must also be financially viable. Here is a shopping list of some of the expenses that the organizer will incur:

- venue hire
- audiovisual equipment
- public liability insurance
- website development and maintenance (probably year round)
- publicity materials—brochures, posters, paid advertising space
- box office costs—staffing, ticket printing and distribution, IT systems
- back office staff and administration
- cleaning and facilities management.

That's quite a list, before adding fees paid to authors and performers. Even paying staff to run the event may not be feasible. Most of the big ones will depend on an army of volunteers to help them run efficiently, as the Olympic Games did.

And those author fees? Don't count on those, even if you're trade-published and a household name. Dolores Montenegro, writing in the *New Statesman* in October 2013, reported that not only does Cheltenham, one of the largest and most prestigious festivals in the UK, not offer a fee to many of its guest authors, it doesn't pay their travel or overnight expenses either, saving its budget to fund high-profile celebrities such as athletes and rock stars who will help get the event national media attention:

The literary festival of old was based on a communal model. All authors, from Max Hastings to debut novelists, were treated the same. The big authors pulled in the punters and subsidized the smaller writers...

It was a lovely idea, but rarely happens nowadays. Many festivals have a two-tier approach to author care. The big names get limos, love, and impeccable organization, whereas the smaller names are shunted off into small venues and quietly forgotten about...

The retort would be that festivals are about raising profiles and selling books. Authors are expected to be paid in book sales, but most novelists I know are lucky if they sell a dozen copies. And it's not just unknown writers: one former Man Booker winner regularly fills five-hundred-seat venues, but afterwards might sell just twenty books.

— DOLORES MONTENEGRO

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing the festival organizer is that the events all have to be interesting. Not all authors are good at speaking before a live audience, and many books are hard to convey or discuss in such a setting. Booking a big name is only a small part of

the job: The events have to be well choreographed and planned to satisfy the audience. It's no wonder that so many festivals plump for dependable audience-pleasers with backgrounds in show business.

Size Matters

Whereas the larger festivals will have the pulling power to attract substantial sponsorship to help them offset their costs, and the established mailing lists and contacts to be reasonably confident of breaking even or making a profit, many smaller festival organizers have no such security or assurance. Quite a lot are organized by local booksellers trying to draw in extra custom, without the benefit of extra staff or budget to make it happen.

The pivotal role of local bookshops can work to self-published authors' advantage, if they have already cultivated a good relationship with the local bookstore. On the other hand, for organizers operating with limited personnel, the prospect of dealing with individual, self-published authors presents a much more challenging and time-consuming prospect than liaising with the extensive staff of a trade-publishing house. These one-person bands don't have secretaries or publicity aides to answer phone calls or respond to emails. If the author is out walking the dog when the organizer calls, too bad.

Responding to Christine Frost's article about the Boston Book Festival, self-published author Maggie Lynch expounds upon this point:

Event planners like to deal with publishers because they have a single point of contact for multiple authors. This makes it more manageable, and they deal with someone who understands the ins and outs of event coordination. When dealing with individual authors, they are dealing with thirty different people's ideas about how the event should help them and, in effect, are trying to get all the information out of those thirty different people.

My suggestion is that if indie authors want to be included in events, they form groups under some name and have a coordinated effort with a single point of contact. That contact person then serves as the voice for the group.

I recently coordinated a successful Kobo event. It was primarily indie authors, though we did have a couple of traditional authors and a few hybrid authors. I personally spent the equivalent of two months' time recruiting participants, making sure every one of the nineteen authors was on board, sending information as needed, participating in social media, signing event contracts, planning PR and making sure it went out, coordinating with the bookseller, coordinating with Kobo, etc. I had lots of help with other volunteers at the event, but again someone had to coordinate that. In other words, even with the opportunity to participate, it still required a lot of coordination and herding of authors. Like everything in this business, we have to work together and step up and lead, instead of waiting and hoping that we can simply pay a fee and walk in the door and sell. I have always found that group efforts open doors where individuals have more difficulty.

— MAGGIE LYNCH

What Self-Published Authors Can Bring

Self-published authors who are mindful of the festival organizers' challenges and take them into account when making their approach will stand a much greater chance of success in gaining admission on equal terms with their trade-published peers.

It certainly can be done. Enterprising, self-published authors are finding creative, appealing ways to enter the fray. The Triskele Books collective of five self-published novelists devised not one but two events that were snapped up by the organizers of the 2013 Chorleywood Literature Festival: a panel discussion about the nature of their author collective; and an innovative Human Reference

Library session, in which each of the five offered one-to-one consultation slots for members of the public interested in discussing different aspects of self-publishing. Publicized enticingly in the festival brochure and energetically by the five authors via their huge combined social media and online presence, both events attracted a healthy attendance of writers, aspiring writers and readers, aged eleven to over eighty.

John Holland, organizer of the twice-yearly Stroud Short Stories public reading event featuring mostly self-published or unpublished writers, persuaded the Cheltenham Literature Festival to include a “Greatest Hits” event bringing together seven indie authors, each with a local following, to create a sell-out success—the ambition of any festival organizer. By demonstrating that indie authors can attract and satisfy festival goers, such achievements pave the way for the involvement of more self-published authors in mainstream events.

Self-published authors may gain tangential access to events, in spite of, rather than because of, their self-published status. These opportunities should not be dismissed lightly: they increase the author’s chance of being drawn into the main events program in future years or invited to other festivals.

There are also opportunities to be associated with the festival, even if you are not actually a part of its official program. If there are local radio stations or print media reporting on the event, it’s worth pursuing openings there, as both are likely to be searching for related news stories and features.

A couple of years ago, I (Debbie) engineered the opportunity to join a radio discussion panel broadcast live by BBC Radio Gloucestershire from the Authors’ Lounge at the Cheltenham Literature Festival with two trade-published authors, one of whom was bestselling novelist Katie Fforde, president of the UK Romantic Novelists’ Association. With the focus of the discussion on the changing nature of publishing and reading, this was a valuable opportunity to draw attention to the rising profile of self-publishing before a significant audience, and it helped grow my relationship both

with Katie Fforde and with BBC Radio Gloucestershire, on which I now have a regular monthly slot as part of the lunchtime show's "Book Club" slot.

How Self-Published Authors Should Proceed

Firstly, consider in which of the three main areas you can add depth and breadth to any literature festival program. Which of the following best suits your work, your personality and your experience?

- Acting as a panel member for discussion about self-publishing, an area of increasing interest to many festival visitors, whether writers aspiring to self-publish, or readers keen to understand what self-publishing really means.
- Appearing as a writer, talking about and reading from your books.
- Offering advice or education as an expert, with the ability to lead teaching workshops or seminars, for example, on different aspects of self-publishing or book marketing, or based on the content of your book.

Take into consideration what you personally want to get out of appearing at the festival. Raising your author profile, meeting new readers, and selling books will probably be high on your list, but you may also be keen to share particular experiences or thoughts, either those that led you to write the book, or from your self-publishing journey, and to learn from others. It's also a significant marketing bonus to be able to describe yourself in your marketing materials as "featured at XYZ Festival," adding social proof to readers who weren't at the event that your work was good enough for inclusion in the program.

Each of the three kinds of event listed above offers considerable scope. If you wanted to talk about self-publishing, for example, on which aspect would you like to focus: the production process, cover

design, book marketing, or selling foreign rights...? Which subject could you present in the most interesting and credible way?

If you come up with a great talk that is well received, you may well find yourself asked to give the same talk many times over. That's fabulous, but only if you'll enjoy it as much the twentieth time as the first! Don't be afraid to say no to opportunities that don't match your objectives, if you feel that your time and energy would be better spent elsewhere.

How to Choose the Most Appropriate Festival

Find a festival that suits you. Different festivals, conferences, and events have different focuses. For example, PubSmart in Charleston very much revolves around the business of books and the kind of entrepreneurial indie author who wants to make a living from writing. Its organizers would welcome a quite different kind of proposal from, say, the Literary Conference in London, which centers on literary values in a digital age.

Once you've worked out at which event you'd like to speak and what you'd like to deliver, write a letter succinctly explaining why the session you wish to offer is ideal for this particular festival, and why you are the person to deliver it.

- Visit the festival website to enable you to understand its specific brief, how it is organized, and how effectively its events are publicized.
- Examine previous programs to acquire a feel for preferred types of events.
- Consider how the program describes events to get an idea of the festival's audience.
- Connect your skills and interests to the festival in a meaningful way.

Online searching, particularly via Twitter and Google, is the best

way to find the right festivals. (Don't forget to share your experience via ALLi afterwards, to help others gauge whether it's right for them.)

How to Pitch to Festival Organizers

Compile a submission package that will make your chosen festival organizer want to book you. Rather like a manuscript submission package, this will consist of an all-purpose core of material that you can then adapt to make it specific to other festivals.

Your package should be a single document. You are selling about an hour of your time for a talk, workshop, or panel discussion. To do that effectively you need to demonstrate that what you have to say is of interest to festival goers (this is the equivalent of the pitch); that you have enough well-thought-out material to fill an hour (not less and not more—this is the equivalent of the synopsis); and that you are the best person to say this (because when you're speaking directly to an audience, you matter).

With the above in mind, your package should include a pitch of 150–200 words on the following:

- what you intend to talk about
- what format your talk will take
- why this will be really interesting.

A good way to approach this is to describe it as it might appear in the festival program, with a single paragraph that will ensure your event is a sell-out. Then, outline the general areas you intend to cover in the order you intend to cover them. If you envisage doing anything other than a straightforward talk, this is the place to say that. This is important. Variations in format can make an event really exciting and be a great selling point, but they can also be scary to organizers. If you will be using handouts, for example, state that you have a set of workshop materials that you will bring with you. A good festival will reimburse large photocopying costs, but no one wants to find an

overstretched volunteer to rush around duplicating materials at the last minute.

In my experience as an event organizer (Dan), 90 percent of writers turn up very nearly late, expecting to find access to a free photocopier, breezily holding a handful of sheets and saying, “Oh, I assumed you’d be able to take care of that.” If, instead, you behave well and make their lives easier, organizers will clamor to have you back.

Avoid slideshows and PowerPoint if possible. Laptops and projectors may be everywhere in your day job, but most festivals still struggle to find venues with adequate IT facilities. If your presentation is going to need audiovisual equipment (AV), the organizers will look at their timetable and the number of available slots will instantly shrink. Every event organizer has tales of speakers making assumptions about IT that make them very unwilling to take risks. If you feel strongly that you need to work that way, discuss it after you’ve been booked.

Include your press kit with your application. You will be asked for it once you’re booked, but it both sells you and shows a degree of professionalism if you offer one up front. The press kit is what the organizers will use along with your pitch to sell your event to the public and the media. It should contain the following:

- a relevant, persuasive bio, ideally in concise but syntactical bullet points that clearly show why you are the best person to give this talk, including previous public speaking experience
- any relevant press reviews or references from previous events
- website links (to your personal website, rather than your books on retail sites)
- a publicity photo, ideally in high resolution (300 dpi+) for print use, and low resolution (72 dpi) for the festival website.

Event Guidelines for Self-Publishing Authors

If the festival organizer does you the courtesy of treating you on an equal footing with trade-published authors, make sure you reciprocate. In particular, do not be over-zealous in communications with festival organizers, who, because of their workload, tend to communicate by blanket email when it comes to information on venues, green rooms, travel arrangements, and reimbursement processes. Do feel that you can send individual emails when you are invited to do so, or where you have a special requirement, such as one deriving from a disability, but don't send individual emails about information likely to be covered in circulars.

Once your booking has been confirmed, do not send further emails because you think you should have had a response by a certain time. You are on the mailing list and will be told when organizers are ready to send information out. Dealing with superfluous emails will only delay their schedule.

If there is a reason you need to know detailed information in advance—for example, if you need to book time off work to attend—state this clearly when confirming your acceptance, giving as much information as possible.

If the organizer has offered to sell your books in the festival bookstore, it is your responsibility to ensure that your books arrive in the right place at the right time, and that unsold books are collected promptly according to their requirements.

Be professional and organized. This doesn't just mean turning up when and where you are supposed to. It means anticipating any needs you may have and stating them clearly at the earliest possible opportunity.

Keep an up-to-date biography at all times, in various lengths that can be sent promptly upon request for use in promotional material. Having one in each of thirty, fifty, a hundred, and two hundred words means you're ready for all requests.

An Alternative Solution: Set Up Your Own Festival

While this is not a solution for the faint-hearted or time-pressed, one way of ensuring the inclusion of indie authors at lit-fests is to found your own. The Triskele collective mentioned earlier has now established its own festival in central London, while I (Debbie) founded a festival in 2015 in my village, now an annual event showcasing around fifty authors, poets, and illustrators, most of them indies.

I've sidestepped one financial challenge by making all events free to attend and requiring authors to give their time free of charge, but it's been well received by all involved, and each year gets bigger and better. The audiences tell me they love meeting "authors we've never heard of," and the authors have found it valuable experience that gives them the confidence to apply to appear elsewhere.

Festival Organizers and Self-Publishers: FAQs Answered

How do I find self-published authors who will be the best match for my festival?

If you are looking for events on a certain theme, the chances are you will already be asking around or know who the experts are in that field. Don't be afraid if self-publishers' names come up. Many people choose self-publishing because they have a passion for quirky, niche subjects that can make for the most wonderfully entertaining talks. ALLi is always happy to make suggestions.

How do I know whether there's an audience for this? If I don't know who this person is, chances are my audience won't.

Festival and event goers fall into two categories: those who go for the person speaking, and those who go for the subject being spoken about. Events divide around these two categories of punter.

Obviously, some well-known (and less well-known but loved within their niche) authors will sell an event by their name, and yes, self-publishing authors are beginning to fall into this category, but not, as yet, in great numbers. On the other hand, many of the best festival events attract through what they are about. A self-published author's lack of high profile doesn't detract from their ability to give a wonderfully interesting talk that would fit the flavor of your festival perfectly. This is particularly true for workshops.

I am worried about the quality of self-publishing authors' work.

Follow the recommendations in the chapter "How to Find Great Self-Published Books". Don't be afraid to contact ALLi, who will suggest authors we can vouch for. We will help you to find an author who meets your specific requirements and has experience of speaking at such events (provided your reimbursement to writers is fair and equitable). If ALLi puts you in touch with authors, please provide honest feedback about them and their events, so as to help us serve both authors and festivals more effectively in future. We welcome your feedback whenever you have a self-published author, especially when someone has impressed, so that we can build a large, reliable network of trusted speakers.

Self-published authors can be over-assertive and hands-on. I understand they have to be, because they do everything for themselves, but I don't have time to hand-hold and be at the other end of the telephone/email for them all the time.

We have drawn up a list of guidelines for authors earlier in this chapter. ALLi advises all members seeking a festival booking to read these guidelines. We'd also like to make some suggestions for festival organizers as to how to ensure you get the best out of self-published authors.

Guidelines for Festival Organizers Programming Self-Publishers

Consider the value that self-publishing writers can bring to your festival. If you have not already planned one, consider holding a panel or workshop session on self-publishing, run by experienced self-published authors.

Consider self-published authors as authors as well as publishers, by which we mean don't forget to invite them to talk about or read from their books or work in progress. Many writers self-publish because their books do not match trade-publishers' genres or other constraints. This kind of book, and the writers who produce them, can provide much more thought-provoking and entertaining talks than many within the mainstream.

Where authors are all doing the same thing at a festival, do treat them the same in terms of their fee for speaking, travel, and accommodation, green room access, gala dinners, and other incidentals. Don't have double standards based on how their books are published, or copies they sell, or degree of fame. If you are charging the audience for tickets, you should be paying the authors an appropriate appearance fee.

All writers recognize that festivals depend on big names to attract their audience, but interesting, less well-known authors add breadth and depth, giving the festival credibility and potential for future growth. Paying a flat-rate fee for all speakers, plus a percentage of ticket sales for an event, is an equitable way for organizers to balance all the variables.

Include all participating authors in your festival communications, not only as a courtesy, but also to ensure that they do not need to keep coming back to you for clarification on issues.

Ensure fair coverage in your promotional materials and practices, giving equal space to all authors in the program and on the website, with equal opportunities to have a web link and photograph featured.

Include your self-published authors in your media campaign, giving them coverage in your press releases and pointing journalists

in their direction. Ensure any in-house podcasts, radio broadcasts, and videocasts reflect the diversity of your festival.

If there is a festival bookstore, make sure self-published authors are able to sell through it and are given signing times and space, where this is general festival practice.

By adhering to these guidelines, with mutual respect and understanding, self-published authors and festival organizers can work together to the considerable benefits of all concerned, especially that important end user, the book buyer. Now we move on to another influential area that affects those buyer's perceptions of a book: the world of prizes and awards.

AWARDS AND PRIZES

There are numerous literary prizes for books of all genres, themes, and backgrounds, including many open only to self-publishers. Of these, some are prestigious, increasingly high profile, and doing wonderful work that we wholeheartedly support, while others are problematic, existing only to enrich their organizers, coming with excessive entry fees, exploitative contracts, conflicts of interest, or high-pressure sales attached.

ALLi's Watchdog Desk monitors awards and prizes and keeps a rated register.

Our guiding principles are as follows:

1. The event exists to recognize talent, not to enrich the organizers.

Avoid events that are driven by excessive entry fees, marketing services to entrants, or selling merchandise like stickers and certificates.

2. Receiving an award is a significant achievement.

An event that hands out awards like Halloween candy dilutes the

value of those awards, rendering them meaningless. Beware events that offer awards in dozens of categories. These are often schemes to maximize the number of winners in order to sell them stickers and other merchandise.

3. The judging process is transparent and clear.

Watch out for contests whose judging criteria and personnel are vague or undisclosed.

4. Prizes are appropriate and commensurate with the entry fees collected.

If a cash prize is offered, it should align with the size of the entry fee. “Exposure” is not an appropriate prize. Representation or publication are acceptable prizes, but only if offered by a reputable company without hidden fees.

5. Entrants are not required to forfeit key rights to their work.

Avoid contests with onerous terms, especially those which require the forfeiture of publishing rights without a termination clause. When in doubt, have an independent professional review the terms.

The Watchdog Desk rates awards into three categories: recommended, caution due, and not recommended. Undoubtedly there will be new contests and awards in all three categories in the coming years.

In this chapter we focus on major prizes. What is true for them is equally true all the way down the ladder; but also, we find that many of the smaller prizes are already more inclusive. What readers and writers need to see is doors opening at the top, bringing self-publishing onto a wider platform and being treated equivalently with trade-published work.

When we first wrote this section, the Folio Prize, now known as the Rathbones Folio Prize, had just launched. Intended as a response

to the Man Booker Prize, the award was open to self-published titles from the very start, and indeed the 2014 shortlist included Sergio De La Pava's originally self-published *A Naked Singularity*.

Since then, advances have been made, some of which we couldn't possibly have foreseen: Bob Dylan winning the Nobel Prize in Literature, anyone? But that moment was hardly the opening of the floodgates. In this updated version of the chapter, although a lot of our original observations still hold true, we will offer a survey of how the landscape has changed, and what changes have yet to be made.

The experience of small independent presses is in many ways an excellent illustration and template, both for self-publishing writers and for prize organizers. The 2012 Man Booker Prize was a watershed moment. The prize attracted a lot of negative attention in 2011 following remarks by judges that they were looking for "readable" books. The shortlist of 2012 went a long way toward silencing the critics, and the inclusion of books from small presses, such as Salt Publishing's *The Lighthouse* and And Other Stories' *Swimming Home*, were an important part of this. They made the unequivocal case for the literary quality of the output from small presses and for the centrality of small presses to the best of contemporary literature. Since then, small presses, regularly represented on prize lists, have gone from strength to strength. We have even seen crowdfunding publishing platform Unbound hit the Booker shortlist with Paul Kingsnorth's *The Wake*, and for the past two years the same tiny press, Oneworld, has published the winner. And the Booker Prize has undergone further opening up, now accepting entries from the US. Not, though, from indies.

Small presses in general are being talked about in the media, as well as their individual books. It seems reasonable that all books, however they are produced, should be compared on an equal basis for what they say and how they say it, rather than how they came into being. If entry for most high-profile and prestigious prizes is opened up to self-published alongside trade-published authors, the best writing will rise to the top, regardless of its origin, and it will soon be clear that self-published books can be of the very highest quality.

It is only when the major national and international awards are truly inclusive that good writing of all kinds can compete fairly and equally.

Why Book Awards Matter

As the old saying goes, comparisons are odious, and literary comparisons most odious of all. The best book award schemes, however, perform three important tasks:

- they recognize and validate excellence
- they bring good books within a defined field to readers interested in that area
- they help talented writers build careers that enable them to write more.

Winning a major book award is a clear indicator to the book-buying public of a book's worth, at least as perceived by the judges of that prize. A prizewinner or even a shortlisted runner-up sticker on a book cover has the power to boost sales, whether or not the books bought because of it are actually read and enjoyed by the general public, or left gathering dust on the coffee table to impress visitors.

The top literary prizes are very high profile, making news headlines many times over whenever they are awarded. Announcements of longlists, shortlists, winners, and the aftermath all provide valuable publicity for those authors lucky enough to be involved.

Many other benefits may be gained beyond the winner's cash prize—\$15,000 for the Pulitzer, £50,000 for the Man Booker, and a staggering (Swedish Kronor) SEK8 million (US\$1.2 million, €0.93 million, £0.6 million) for the Nobel Prize in Literature. The winner may expect to accrue increased sales in the home market, new or extended contracts from overseas, sales of translation rights, higher advances for future commissions, and greater visibility for their backlist.

We might even go as far as to include ironic awards, such as the highly regarded *Literary Review's* infamous Bad Sex in Fiction Award, given to the author who produces the worst description of a sex scene in a novel. Even this kind of award can help to sell more books and raise authors' profiles. Awards with any degree of marketing clout for a book may be covetable.

With such massive prizes and potential profits for publishers, it is no surprise that the top awards sometimes seem to be little short of a battleground for competing publisher armies. To say that the big trade-publishers and their authors are keen to enter is an understatement. Some writers even demand their publisher includes in their contracts an agreement to enter their books for major prizes, at the publisher's expense. Considering that the current terms for entry to the Man Booker Prize include a commitment from each entrant's publisher to contribute up to £10,000 toward the scheme's publicity costs, this is no small undertaking. There are other demands that would be beyond the reach of most self-funding self-publishing authors operating as individuals; the publisher of the winning book must agree to make 1,000 copies of the book available to the award body within ten days of winning, presumably for publicity purposes.

Even without such conditions, there is a clause that seems specifically designed to knock author-publishers out of the running, for no apparent reason other than a pre-formed bias against any potential "wannabe": "Self-published books are not eligible where the author is the publisher or where a company has been specifically set up to publish that book."

This rule hardly seems necessary, and it would dignify the Man Booker Prize to remove it, for even if technically they were allowed to enter, few self-published authors could afford to take the risk that they might win.

As well as the many, and proliferating, awards open exclusively to self-published authors, there are mainstream award programs that offer prizes to authors of self-published books within segregated categories. One such program is the UK Festival of Romance Awards, which includes an Award for Best Author-Published Novel, and a

New Talent Award open to books as yet unpublished. The small print confirms that its definition of “as yet unpublished” includes self-published books.

Many self-published authors find this attitude offensive and demeaning. One can only hope that any books entered in that category will gradually reform the system from within, demonstrating indisputably to the judges that their standards are on a professional par with the books in the trade-published categories.

Some awards remain closed to self-published authors on the basis that the organization giving the award couldn't cope with the extra volume of entries that might be received.

In his blog post “A World of Writers and Readers: Understanding Modern Publishing”, ALLi member Karl Drinkwater intelligently addresses the eligibility rules for the Wales Book of the Year competition run by Literature Wales, and concludes:

Do non-discriminatory prizes get too many entries? No. Can it be managed? Of course. An insider told me it's really not hard to do; the Folio Prize starts with a form submission about the book and goes from there...

Also, if an organization was worried about the number of entries, it can implement quality controls. This is far better than arbitrary exclusions. Apply the same criteria to all books, trade-published or independent. Personally, I'd exclude books with more than one typo or error (grammatical, printing, formatting). That would get the list down pretty quickly, without prejudice. But they could be more lenient than me and still have a manageable list with poor-quality works excluded.

— KARL DRINKWATER

No self-published author has yet been awarded any of the big three: the Pulitzer, the Man Booker, or the Nobel Prize in Literature, though one did come close. Way ahead of her time in the self-

publishing revolution, Jill Paton Walsh made the shortlist of the then Booker Prize in 1994 with *Knowledge of Angels*. (You can read her account of her achievement in *The Guardian*: theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/oct/24/jill-paton-walsh-a-life.)

At that time, author-publishing was available only to a small minority with specialist knowledge. Now that the digital revolution has kicked in, it can only be a matter of time before another self-published author's book is longlisted, shortlisted, and declared the winner.

A Question of Attitude?

Perhaps one reason for the low number of self-published entries for such literary awards is that self-published authors are too quick to assume they are not eligible for the big prizes, or to aim their sights lower at what they perceive to be more achievable goals: smaller, lesser-known, and specialist prizes.

An interesting coda here comes from speaking to the organizers of one of the prizes that has not only opened its doors, but has actively sought out indies and made a big deal of its openness. The Peters Fraser + Dunlop Young Writer of the Year Award is worth £5,000 to the winner and has in the past been won by such luminaries as Sarah Waters and Zadie Smith. When the prize was relaunched in 2015 after a hiatus since 2009, it was opened to self-published titles.

ALLi promoted the event, and Dan attended a special event for bloggers to help spread the news, but there were still very few self-published entrants. Of course, an under-thirty demographic isn't necessarily rich in indies, but it remains worthy of note that it is not just that prizes need to be more open to indies, but also that more indies need to look at prizes.

Jamaican author Ezekel Alan almost didn't enter his self-published debut novel *Disposable People* for the Commonwealth Book Prize 2013, for which he was named a Regional Winner.

My first novel was written almost as a process of catharsis or perhaps exorcism, getting rid of some old ghosts from the past. A major national newspaper back home thought of it differently, however, and gave it rave reviews. Then the person who edited the book, a Brit, pointed out to me that the Commonwealth Book Prize was now open to self-published novels. I had known of the Commonwealth Book Prize before, but never once thought that my act of exorcism would even remotely be worthy of consideration for that award. The novel was entered, and became the first self-published book to win a major international prize. The publicity which ensued was overwhelming.

— EZEKEL ALAN

Irish children's author Benji Bennett, by contrast, is now taking such things in his stride, winning the children's category of the Bord Gáis Energy Irish Book Awards not once, but twice, most recently in 2013, for *When You Were Born*. Reporting the award on his *Independent Publishing Magazine* blog, Mick Rooney wrote:

Ireland's premier national book award is unusual in that, unlike other prestigious book awards, it does not preclude self-published titles from being nominated, requiring only that a title should be written by an Irish author, published within the year of the awards, and in print and available through Irish book wholesalers. Titles are nominated and voted on equally by a panel of book industry experts and public online voting... This is actually Benji Bennett's second time to win the Children's Category Award (first in 2009), having self-published seven books since 2008.

— MICK ROONEY

There are many other prestigious book awards around the world, albeit with smaller purses and wider remits than the big three. Unless there are rules specifically excluding them, self-publishing authors should feel free to enter their books, if they are confident that the award is appropriate to their work and their book is of a suitable category and standard.

For some time to come, every such award won will be a victory not only for the author, but for the cause of self-published authors everywhere.

A New Openness

The Folio Prize, (now the Rathbones Folio Prize), whose first shortlist in 2014 included Sergio De La Pava's originally self-published *A Naked Singularity*, was the first major award that consciously opened its doors to indies. The award is also opening up to nonfiction as well as fiction and to digital-only novels.

The award, worth £40,000, was set up as a reaction to what was felt to be a dumbing down of the Booker Prize, and it was most encouraging to see this level of openness in a prize that placed itself, artistically, at an even more extreme level than the very much more closed-off Booker. The award has struggled to get off the ground, sadly, losing its original sponsors and taking a year out in 2016, but it is now back, and it would be nice to see self-published titles figuring soon.

Perhaps the biggest step forward came in the summer of 2016. When questioned as to why they remain closed, the most frequent answer received from organizers of major prizes is that "the quality just isn't there to merit the work" of opening up.

So little wonder that when one of science fiction's leading gongs, the Arthur C Clarke Award, opened itself to indies, the reason given was cause for much celebration in the self-publishing community.

Becky Chambers' novel *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet*, originally self-published, was shortlisted for an award already open to indies, the Kitschies, and subsequently picked up by Harper Voyager.

The Arthur C Clarke organizers were shocked that one of the most celebrated books of recent years would have, had Chambers turned Harper down, been ineligible for their award, so they changed their rules. It is interesting, and rather sad, that the other major prize for which Chambers' book was shortlisted after being picked up, the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction, remains closed.

This year, for the first time in the fifty-seven-year history of the Romantic Novelists' Association (RNA), the award shortlists included both self-published and trade-published authors. Kate Johnson was named winner of the first Paranormal or Speculative Romantic Novel Award for *Max Seventeen*, making her the first self-published author in the award's history to win one of the prestigious RoNAs.

Number three of the RNA rules for entry to the awards states: "Entries must be published by a traditional publisher (see rule nine) or where self-published or author subsidized, a novel is only eligible if the author is currently a Full or Independent Author Member of the RNA."

Recent new awards, stating that they are open to all authors regardless of how their books are published, are the Arnold Bennett Prize and the Jhalak Prize.

Other awards remain closed to indies with no reasons given. An ALLi member who has been frustrated by such exclusions is Lorna Fergusson, who questions the allocation of grants and funds by the Society of Authors (SoA). Fergusson is a member and supporter of SoA. "It does sterling work," she says, "and I have been impressed with Nicola Solomon's advocacy on behalf of writers, and her desire that publishers should do right by their authors. It's ironic, though, to see their latest advert on Facebook (and in *The Author*), promoting 'Funding for authors, to buy time, and aid research.'"

One of these funds is the Authors' Foundation, which offers money to help with research and travel. Fergusson continues:

The wording of this grant starts by saying that "Any published author working on a full-length book for a British publisher who needs funding

is welcome to apply.” Later it adds: “Without a contractual commitment by a publisher you may apply so long as you have had at least one book published and there is a strong likelihood that your next book will be published.”

Immediately I see issues with this because it is not clear what constitutes a “published author” or “a publisher” here. It does not allow for the fluid state of such definitions in the current publishing industry. I, as a self-published author, am a publisher, using my own Fictionfire Press imprint, for instance.

I have quoted here from The Author. The Facebook advert goes further, adding:

“Please note, we are unable to accept self-published authors as grants cannot be awarded to help towards the costs of publication. Grants cannot be made for education or research costs.”

— LORNA FERGUSSON

This rejection was especially galling to Fergusson as it came in the wake of her ineligibility to apply for a British Library residency that included access to the library’s special collections and was open to writers working on books set in America or Canada. It seemed ideal for her book, *The Concealment*, set in Canada among other locations.

This work already had prizewinning potential: the opening of that novel was awarded first prize in the *Words with Jam* First Page competition. She was disappointed to find, on further investigation, that she was not eligible:

It turned out that this residency was only available to those who already had a contract to publish the book. How can you have the contract if the book is not yet written because you haven’t done the research, which is why you’re applying for assistance to carry out said research? How is this practicable for anyone who is writing their book on spec and has not signed a two-book contract?

It's the same kind of paradox I've noted with the Society of Authors: a trumpeting of the values of freedom and open-mindedness and encouragement negated by an outdated sense of exclusivity. They have added that you must now have evidence of a contract and publishing schedule and say "We do not accept self-published authors of any kind," which is a shocker of a phrase.

— LORNA FERGUSSON

Similarly, the terms and conditions for applicants to Gladstone's Library's Writer in Residence Programme states: "We do not accept self-published authors of any kind. No correspondence can be entered into."

This is especially ironic as Gladstone's Library's program is aimed at writers whose work engages with liberal values:

By liberal values, we do not mean views aligned with any one political ideology, but rather a commitment to freedom and social justice; tolerance and respect of difference; open-mindedness coupled with intellectual curiosity [and] generosity of spirit and a willingness to learn from others.

There has also been a shift among those prizes administered by the Society of Authors. The Young Writer of the Year is a prime example of this, with organizers not only welcoming indies, but consulting with ALLi on how to attract the very best indie entrants.

For those not in the eighteen to thirty-five category, the McKitterick Prize, which has a substantial reward pot and is open to debut writers over forty, also welcomes indies.

The Society does not set the rules of these awards; it merely administers the funds. For some organizations, it may take time to change rules that have long been in place.

It is also worth mentioning that many of the most prestigious short story awards are open to all, with some hugely prestigious examples, such as the Commonwealth Writers' Prize.

There is a key point here that indies need to appreciate. And it comes down to that old adage: make yourself so good they can't ignore you. When a book comes along that is truly brilliant, and the prize that should have been its natural home has no choice but to reject it, that's when the floodgates will open.

It has happened in science fiction. Sadly, it hasn't happened with general or literary fiction. Yet.

Prizes Exclusively for Self-Published Authors

There are many more prize schemes for self-published books. There are many awards limited to self-published books. These can come and go very quickly and often have numerous genre categories and high entry fees, both of which suggest a primary concern with maximizing entry income over the publicity for authors. Fortunately, ALLi's watchdog service examines new prizes to assess the benefits they offer to readers and writers, rather than to just their organizers. Details can be found at the end of this chapter, and we highly recommend that, before considering any indie award, writers consult this guide.

It is down to individual authors to seek out the awards they feel best fit their work in terms of territory, genre, and attitude, and also to decide when it's better to walk away rather than to submit their book for an unworthy award.

Many self-published authors feel that spending time seeking out such awards would be better spent writing and actively building a direct relationship with their reader community. Bestselling and acclaimed novelist Linda Gillard says:

Having been shortlisted for and won various awards over the years, I've never seen anything other than very short-term exposure and no

subsequent improvement at all in sales. I really don't think readers care about awards or competitions. (Look at Fifty Shades.) Have you ever bought a book because it won a competition? I haven't. I don't think anything sells books apart from readers talking positively about them and retailer promotions. So I'm always looking for what's quick to do, what's free. I think there's something else to be said about competitions and prizes. You're almost setting yourself up to fail. Who needs that? We didn't become writers to win. I'm thinking of a friend of mine who won a prestigious BBC scriptwriting competition. She entered the following year and wasn't longlisted. Well, obviously—she'd won the year before! But she beat herself up about not even being longlisted. She's the kind of writer where failure goes deep, but success is fluky.

If you're that sort of person, competitions can be a stick (and probably an expensive stick) to beat yourself with. I think it's like everything else we discuss at ALLi: if you enjoy it, do it, then let it go. It's the expectations that do the damage, in my opinion. And the sense of good writing time wasted.

— LINDA GILLARD

How to Choose Awards for Submission

If you do decide to submit your work for awards, proceed with caution, or you may do more harm than good, both to your own reputation and to that of the self-publishing movement as a whole.

Avoid contests with onerous terms, especially those that require the forfeiture of publishing rights without a termination clause. When in doubt, have an independent professional review the terms.

When you find an award that seems a good match for your work, don't rush in. Read the submission guidelines carefully, and work out exactly how much it will cost you. This may be more than is immediately evident. As well as the entry fee, if you have to send a quantity of print books, include the cost and the price of shipping in your calculations.

One well-known online award program specifically for self-published books requires a \$75 fee per entry in a single category (add another \$50 per additional category), plus the submission of two print books (add your shipping costs for these). There are sixty categories, and many books would fall into more than one. Although there are a handful of larger prizes, the first prize in each category is just \$100, a medal, a certificate, and a number of stickers for your books. How many stickers? Five. If you want more, you have to pay for them. Oh, and there's an invitation to attend an awards ceremony in New York. Doubtless, you will get a bill for that too.

Sadly, there appears to be no shortage of entrants. Many of the top prize winners have fewer than twenty reviews each on Amazon.com, some not flattering. In the same vein that Michael N Marcus declared on the ALLi blog that every book can now be a bestseller if put in a sufficiently rarefied category, doubtless every book can win a prize, provided the author is prepared to pay for entry to enough indiscriminate award schemes.

The fact that award schemes charge for entry should not be a deterrent. It is not unreasonable to ask entrants who are taking a small punt on winning to contribute to the considerable costs of running such a program. After all, it is you, not the organizers of the award scheme, who will ultimately profit from increased sales if you win. That is why many major award schemes can only operate by attracting commercial sponsors who invest in return for publicity for their own business.

However, before proceeding, ascertain whether the award program you wish to enter is charging a reasonable and affordable fee in relation to any benefits that winning might yield. Are the costs balanced by the benefits?

If you think yes, next examine the program's marketing material: its website, the awards it offers, its promotional activity. Does it look professional? An amateurish award logo won't do your book or your author website any favors. In fact, they do the opposite.

Finally, if the program passes those tests, take time to research previous winners. Have you heard of them? If not, look them up on

Amazon. Take a “Look Inside” their books, read their reviews. Does what you see marry up with their status as award-winning authors? If not, it is reasonable to assume that the award is a scam to extract money from naive newbie authors: click away and move on.

ALLi watchdog John Doppler maintains an Award and Contest Ratings list on our Self-Publishing Advice Center, and those general guidelines, listed previously in this chapter, will help you assess the value of any award not included on ALLi’s list

ASSOCIATIONS AND SOCIETIES

Joining a professional organization for writers can be as much an affirmation for some authors as seeing their name on the cover of their first book. Self-published authors of the joining kind are keen to become members of whatever professional body is their natural home.

Such organizations are many and varied. They range from the catch-all Society of Authors in the UK, the Writers' Guild or Career Writers' Association in the US, or the Writers' Union of Canada, for example, to genre groups such as:

- **Romance:** Romance Writers of America (RWA), the Romantic Novelists' Association (RNA)
- **Thrillers:** Crime Writers Association (CWA), Mystery Writers of America (MWA), International Thriller Writers (ITW), Sisters In Crime (SIC)
- **Historical novels:** The Historical Novel Society (HNS)
- **Children's:** The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI)
- **Sci-fi and fantasy:** The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA), Broad Universe (BU).

Specialist groups united by something other than the content of their books may also gather together, like the Society of Women Writers and Journalists or the European Medical Writers Association.

Some authors join writers' organizations to share specific benefits offered by the groups, which may be very wide indeed for those that are effectively trade unions. Others may join simply as a statement that they have arrived as a writer. It is down to the individual to choose how much they wish to engage with any such organization. Some writers are simply not natural joiners of anything, and if that suits them best, that's fine. Others wish to play a full and active part, taking their place alongside trade-published authors for the greater good of all concerned.

Choosing the Best Association for You

Biggest or longest established doesn't necessarily mean best, even though the larger the group, the more negotiating power it has to gain discounts and benefits for its members. Local chapters of big organizations such as the RWA or HNS, or small local independent groups that are more accessible and personal, may be more helpful to you in furthering your writing. Bristol Women Writers, which admits only ten authors at any time, and the South Carolina Writers' Workshop are two names that cropped up during the research for this book.

Even the most ardent campaigner will understand that these professional bodies, many of them very long established, are protective of their reputations and are nervous of devaluing membership by admitting authors who may bring the organizations into disrepute. All well and good, except when a self-published author wishes to join an association that vets applicants according to how their book has been published. Thus, two authors whose work is of equal quality, and whose books, to the eye of the humble reader, look equally professional and appealing, will receive different treatment, because one has been published by a third party and the other has not.

Even worse is if such discrimination happens between authors

where the self-published author's work is better written, more professionally produced, sells more copies, and is part of a more extensive oeuvre than is true of many trade-published authors.

What will it mean when a writer sells thousands of books but fails to secure a review or secret handshake from a union tribunal? That they're not really a professional writer? That they're not part of Canada's cultural landscape? I find that preposterous. And until the rules to join the union are the same for everyone, I'm just not interested.

— MAIA SEPP

See Maia's guest post on the ALLi blog for her full argument.

Entry by Merit

Deciding on the basis of whether the author is self-published seems a rather blunt instrument, as readers are buying ever-increasing numbers of self-published books. American indie author Karen Myers says: "Organizations should serve their members. Rigidity in the face of opportunity is not a useful solution for anyone."

A more rational approach would be to consider each applicant on the merits of their actual work, to be judged by a membership panel of the organization concerned.

There are ways of doing this that would be open to public scrutiny, such as those used by some of the indie book evaluation sites; for example, average star rating on Amazon, or a minimum of top reviews—but such a system might be too open to manipulation or abuse, as well as giving more weight to Amazon reviewers than many authors and publishers would find palatable.

The number of copies sold might also be considered, but this approach does not compare like with like. Niche books for narrow interest groups seldom sell in great quantities, and the sales of books

with high literary merit are likely to rank far below some bestsellers shifting millions to the masses.

It would therefore seem more appropriate that applications for membership from self-published authors might include an examination of the actual book by the organization's membership committee. (Even fairer if trade-published authors had to undergo the same treatment.) Applicants might be invited to submit a copy of each of their books with their membership form to facilitate inspection of their work with minimal administration or cost to the organization. The basis of their decision would be private, but the panel's honesty would be taken on trust.

Already Opening Up—A Little

In time, there should be less need for such a time-consuming process, because a growing number of authors' associations are already opening up to indies, allowing self-published authors to join the fold.

However, some are doing so tentatively, and in ways that perpetuate discrimination, allowing self-published authors to join only as associates—in effect, second-class citizens who may not enjoy full membership rights. Some indies view this as a start in the right direction. Rather than reject such membership, they prefer to join in whatever way possible and try to influence the organization's attitude from within. This allows them to get to know how the group operates and to understand its culture better than as a non-member, lobbying for equal rights on the outside.

Others view such tiered membership as a grudging insult added to the original injury, and feel that joining on this basis would make them an enabler, allowing prejudice to continue.

I will not accept the role of a second-class citizen voluntarily, not as an indie writer, not as a female, not in any capacity. If the writer organizations get around to recognizing a broader membership group, I

may reconsider, but not unless there is no distinction based on indie/traditional.

— KAREN MYERS

Knocking at the Door

If there really are no options to join your preferred organization as a self-published author, it is worth writing a considered, courteous letter to express your reasons for wanting to join and your track record as a self-published author, enclosing the sample of your work that is most likely to demonstrate that you would be a worthy member. Sending them an impressive book of professional quality will be the most persuasive action, or you might consider the kind of query letter normally sent to an agent or publisher, including a short extract, brief and easy to read. This may help to open the door of resistance by that first important chink, especially if many excellent self-published authors do the same. If the organization still refuses, a courteous reply stating your disappointment, and expressing a continuing interest should they change their policy in future, will keep all parties' options open.

Alternatively, you may decide to switch. Bestselling novelist Linda Gillard, both trade- and self-published, says: "After many years' membership, I have not renewed at the Society of Authors this year. I decided they weren't offering me anything that ALLi wasn't offering."

ALLi: The Alliance of Independent Authors

Now, thanks to founding director Orna Ross, repeatedly designated by the *Bookseller* (the bible of the British book trade) as one of the one hundred most influential people in publishing, there is a thriving organization that all self-published authors may join: the Alliance of Independent Authors, fondly known as ALLi (pronounced "ally", to

reflect the mutually supportive and collaborative nature of its members).

An Inclusive Association

ALLi members include many of the most experienced and successful self-publishing authors, but newcomers and aspiring self-publishers are also warmly welcomed. Some members have also trade-published some titles, and some have worked in related industries such as marketing and promotion. They are a smart, knowledgeable, well-connected group, and well placed to tell their stories and to campaign for equal rights for indies.

So that ALLi is open to all, membership fees are kept as affordable as possible thanks to subsidies from large players in the associated services (Amazon, Kobo, and Ingram), and ALLi has negotiated many attractive discounts with service providers and partner members which, for some members, may entirely offset the cost of their annual subscription.

In addition to the main category of author members, there are three other kinds of membership:

- **Professional members:** These are authors who make their living from self-publishing.
- **Partner members:** These are organizations or individuals who offer high-quality services for self-published authors.
- **Associate members:** This group is writers who have not yet self-published a book but aspire to do so—on publication, associates upgrade to full author membership.

A Sharing Association

ALLi shares its members' knowledge and debate far beyond the bounds of its membership via its free online Self-Publishing Advice Centre. It maintains an authoritative blog as a service to the indie

community, and its guidebooks, free in ebook to members, are also available for non-members to buy.

ALLi members enjoy a lively, confidential, and well-moderated closed Facebook group. There a member may ask a question about any aspect of self-publishing in the knowledge that helpful replies will be posted by those who have experienced and resolved the same issue. The collegiate, democratic, and supportive spirit is enjoyed by all.

All genres of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry are represented within ALLi's membership, and all ranges of ambition. While many authors seek and find commercial success and profit with books of popular appeal to the mass market, ALLi's membership reaches far beyond the strictly commercial aims associated with trade-publishing houses. There are experimental authors, literary writers, and creative mavericks for whom commercial viability is irrelevant, even unwanted.

ALLi's self-published authors may be very individual, but they are increasingly professional and successful, winning prestigious awards, hitting bestseller lists, and being offered (and often rejecting) trade-publishing contracts.

A Caring Association

ALLi is now a force to be reckoned with, and the media are regularly turning to founder, Orna Ross, as a reference on self-publishing. For example, Ross recently advised the BBC about self-publishing costs, and ALLi's team, advisory panel, and members are increasingly invited to write and speak about self-publishing in the press and on national and international TV.

A collection of endorsements of ALLi by its members in the blog post "Why I'm A Member of the Alliance of Independent Authors" summarizes some of the many benefits of membership, as perceived by the members themselves.

ALLi is very caring of its members, offering them a dedicated, determined watchdog service, to root out and expose unscrupulous service providers, guarding self-published authors everywhere against

exploitation. There are still plenty of organizations out there who see would-be self-published authors as easy prey. Sometimes, and surprisingly to those not aware, these can even be subsidiaries of trade-publishing houses. Writers already in the clutches of charlatans will, on approaching ALLi, be helped to extract themselves and find better alternatives. This is important work.

The ALLi watchdog team issues warnings on the blog, and has compiled a regularly updated, comprehensive handbook, *Choosing a Self-Publishing Service* (free as an ebook to ALLi members; available to buy for non-members), which details how to choose a good service, whether that means a freelance service provider, Amazon KDP, or a full-service offering. The guidebook also offers warnings to help writers avoid many of the pitfalls.

ALLi will continue to welcome to its collaborative and supportive community all authors interested in self-publishing.

Equal Pay for Equal Work

Regardless of which organizations self-published authors may choose to or be allowed to join, another area in which equal rights are sought is remuneration for work provided. Clearly, self-published authors make their own marketing judgments and decisions when setting the prices for their books, but many members of ALLi also produce or contribute to newspapers, magazines, journals, newsletters, pamphlets, and trade-published books, published by small and large presses with local, national, and international distribution.

Some also write for screen, stage, radio, apps, and websites, and engage in public speaking at conferences and other events. All these activities command fees set by third parties, and we have already touched on the tricky subject of gaining fair remuneration for such work in the previous chapter on festivals.

Theoretically, rates of pay for making public appearances should also take into account the time and effort members devote to researching as well as writing and/or speaking. Out-of-pocket expenses incurred for these engagements, such as travel,

accommodation, and subsistence, should be reimbursed for authors of any kind.

It is not in ALLi's remit to produce an exhaustive and universally applicable guide to rates and conditions for writers across such a broad spectrum of activities, territories, and regions. Self-published authors who are engaged in such work are advised to seek equivalent treatment to their trade-published peers.

One important part of the Open Up to Indie Authors campaign is to work toward uniformity of practice in the literary, academic, and publishing workspaces. If you are unsure of the appropriate rate for a piece of work, consult your local author societies, unions, and guilds, and, wherever possible, stand your ground to negotiate appropriate fees.

Please feel free to contact ALLi if you need further support or guidance.

CONCLUSION

TOWARDS AN OPEN FUTURE

Whatever lies ahead for the book trade, as it continues to evolve at high speed and in tandem with technological advances and innovations, one thing is certain: self-published authors are here to stay, championed by the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) and all who support them, within and outside the author community.

In this book we have addressed the most important areas in which self-published authors seek recognition on an equal footing with their trade-published peers. We hope that the candid and constructive overview offered by this book will encourage all parties discussed to work together for their mutual benefit.

Aside from the key areas covered in previous chapters, in which more work is needed to open up the way for all authors to be treated equally, there are many other avenues by which all self-published authors may actively demonstrate the quality of their books to the public at large.

Every self-published author is an ambassador for the Open Up to Indie Authors campaign, and no self-published author is an island. If you are a writer, remember that every piece of marketing activity you

undertake not only helps sell your books, but also furthers the cause of the self-publishing sector as a whole.

Every new reader won over, every good book sold, helps persuade the reading public—and the old guard of the publishing establishment—of the quality and value of self-published work.

All writers have a responsibility to our readers to make our books the best they can be before publication. Then we can wear our self-published author badge with pride as one of a growing number of writers whose books are as enticing and satisfying as those emerging from trade press publishers. Nothing will be more powerful than our own proactive involvement in moving the self-publishing community forward on the road to equal opportunities.

Share your achievements wherever you can, online and offline. Engage with your local media, and reach out to book groups. Connect with your neighborhood libraries and bookstores and festivals. Reach out further via free book missions: BookCrossing, Books on the Underground, and Books on the Subway. Seek new and creative methods of writing, publishing, and promotion. Aim high, and help each other.

Whether you are an author, a librarian, a reviewer, a festival organizer, a bookstore owner, or have some other role within the book trade and its associated businesses and nonprofits, please join in and spread the word about our great movement, however you can. Writing, publishing, reaching readers: these are important jobs with a great deal of influence in society. Wherever we are placed within those sectors, we all share a common bond: the desire to bring great books to readers, who will be the ultimate judges of our work and its merit.

Please Sign the Open Up to Indies Petition

We warmly invite you to sign our petition to help us further the Open Up to Indies campaign. You can do so here: bit.ly/OUTIA-petition.

Feedback Welcome

We also welcome comments, clarifications, updates, or additions to any section of this book, so that we may revise it regularly and keep it representative of the current state of the industry. You can contact us any time through our contact form on the ALLi website.

And Finally...

To close on a light and up-to-the-minute note, here's one indication of the ever-strengthening foothold of self-publishing within the book trade. When a remake was planned of the long-running television series *Murder, She Wrote*, the amateur sleuth heroine was not to be a trade-published writer like the original Jessica Fletcher, but an author who'd just self-published her debut novel.

We're hoping she signed our petition...

APPENDIX 1: ALLI CODE FOR AUTHOR COLLABORATIONS

Festivals

As a writer looking to speak at your festival, I undertake:

- to provide information, pictures, and promotional details in a timely fashion
- to be professional in requesting technical/digital equipment well in advance, and to provide audiovisual slides and handouts in advance
- to be punctual and prompt in arriving at the festival, at the green room, and at the event venue
- to prepare travel claims and invoices in a professional, timely fashion
- to liaise with festival bookshops and make books available in advance as required.

Reviewers

In return for having my book reviewed on your blog/publication, I undertake:

- to make my book available to you in your preferred format
- to respond informatively and in a timely manner to readers' questions, should that be your blog policy
- not to respond negatively to your comments, or to those of your readers
- not to respond at all, should that be your blog's policy
- to use all my social media contacts to promote your blog, consisting of [list Twitter followers, Facebook likes, length of email list, blog followers, etc.].

Bookstores

In return for having my book stocked in your store, I undertake:

- to make my books available to you in your preferred ordering fashion
- to collect all unsold books within one week of receiving notice from you should you wish to take books in person on consignment
- otherwise to ensure that a full returns service is in operation
- to list your store on my website as carrying stock of my book
- to encourage readers wishing to purchase physical copies of my book to do so through their local bookshop
- to sign copies in-store should you wish
- to run an event of your choosing
- to ensure my book is available in your preferred size.

Libraries

In return for having my book stocked in your library, I undertake:

- to make my books available to you in your preferred ordering fashion
- to list your library on my website as carrying stock of my book
- to encourage local readers to borrow the book and comment on your website
- to run an event of your choosing
- to donate as many copies of my book as you require in your preferred size and format.

APPENDIX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE

Approach any ten people on the street and ask them to define self-publishing, and you may receive ten different answers. As self-publishing evolves, its terms of reference are rapidly changing.

Some authors who publish their own work are uncomfortable with the term “self-published,” which gives the impression that they have done everything required to publish the book themselves. A properly published book is always a team effort and has been through seven processes: editorial, design, production, distribution, marketing, promotion, and rights sales.

The Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) uses the following terms of reference, which are also used throughout this book:

- **Author:** A published writer of books—the word comes from the Latin verb *augere*, “to make grow, to originate,” and has come to signify the authority bestowed by long-form writing (books).
- **Self-published author:** Any author who has published a book at personal expense. Self-publishers range the full gamut, from those publishing a one-off book for family and

friends, to the most entrepreneurial and productive author–publisher.

- **Indie author:** Authors with an independent mindset, who see themselves as the creative directors of their book projects and writing careers.
- **Author–publisher:** An author who makes a living from writing and publishing their own books. (The Alliance of Independent Authors has a professional membership category for such writers, who earn their living from writing.)
- **Publishing services (also called author services):** Service used by authors to help them to publish their books, ranging from freelance one-person operations, such as designers or editors, to full-package services, that handle all seven publishing processes. Payment to services can take the form of up-front payment or a royalty/commission percentage split between author and service.
- **Trade-publisher:** A business that licenses publishing rights from authors and handles the publication of their books (also sometimes called legacy or traditional publishing). Most of trade-publishing is handled by what are known as the Big Five: Penguin Random House, Hachette Book Group (HBG), Harper Collins, Macmillan, and Simon & Schuster. Trade-publishers are also a publishing service hired by the author, with payment in the form of a large royalty percentage (sometimes as high as 90 percent to the publisher).
- **Independent (indie) press or publisher:** A small trade-publisher that, like the big conglomerates, commissions books from authors, and publishes at the company’s expense, not the author’s. It may or may not be run by authors, who also use the firm to self-publish.

All these terms are of little significance to the average reader, who simply wants a good book, professionally produced.

GLOSSARY

A

abook

Abbreviation of audiobook. *Compare:* pbook and ebook.

acknowledgments

Recognition or honor given to people who have influenced a book or who have made a difference in the life of the author.

ACOS (average cost of sale)

Accumulated total of all costs used to create a product or service, including overheads, fixed and variable costs.

acquisitions board

A group of people who work for a publisher to make decisions about what books to accept for publication.

ACX (Audiobook Creation Exchange)

An Amazon-owned marketplace that matches authors with professional narrators and producers for the creation of audiobooks (abooks).

advance

An upfront payment made by a publisher, as an advance on expected

royalties, in exchange for the rights to publish and sell your book(s) and associated rights.

advance information sheet (AIS)

A short document providing basic book details and information about a book's availability and ordering methods. *Also:* sell sheet.

advance print run

Printing of a book completed before the book's official release date, usually for publicity purposes.

advance review copy (ARC)

A draft of a book sent to beta readers or reviewers prior to publication. *Also:* advance review/reader copy. *Compare:* proof.

aggregator

A service provider that publishes and distributes books to a variety of distributors and retailers. *Compare:* distributor.

algorithm

A process or set of rules used in a calculation; book retailers like Amazon use algorithms to calculate a book's sales ranking.

Amazon Author Central

A free resource that allows you to publish an Author Profile and feature books on Amazon.

Amazon Marketing Services (AMS)

An Amazon program that allows sellers to bid on advertisements displayed alongside search results, product listings, and customer review pages.

Amazon Prime

A subscription service for Amazon customers that offers discounted shipping, access to free entertainment, and other benefits.

Amazon Standard Identification Number (ASIN)

A unique, ten-character identifier for an Amazon product.

appendix

Part of a book that follows a chapter or that comes after all the chapters, with supplemental matter, such as tables or source material.

AskALLi

Alliance of Independent Authors campaign that pledges to answer any self-publishing question that any individual or organization may have.

assisted (self-)publisher

A company that provides book production, distribution, marketing, and other services to self-publishers.

Audible

An Amazon-owned company; the largest audiobook producer and retailer in the US.

audiobook

A recording of a book or magazine being read aloud.

author bio

A brief biography that may include a summary of books written, interests, and achievements.

author brand

A representation of your identity and image that helps your readers connect with you and your books.

author cooperative/collective

A group of authors who work together to leverage the skills of the group in order to advance members' publishing efforts.

author platform

The ability to sell books because of who you are or can reach.

authorpreneur

An author who successfully runs a publishing business.

author-publisher

A professional self-publisher writing for profit.

Authors4Bookstores

Alliance of Independent Authors campaign connecting writers and booksellers, for mutual benefit.

Author Solutions, Inc. (ASI)

A notorious vanity press operating under a variety of imprints.

B**Babelcube**

Company that connects authors with translators and internationally distributes translated books.

back matter

The sections of a book following the last chapter. *Also* end matter.
Compare: front matter.

bar code

An image that encodes information into a series of vertical lines; a book's ISBN encoded in this format.

Bertrams

The second-largest book wholesaler in the UK.

bestseller rank

See: sales rank.

beta reader

A person who provides early feedback or a critique of a book prior to publication.

big data

An enormous supply of data, and often the analysis of such data.

Big Five

The five largest, New York-based traditional publishers: Hachette, HarperCollins, Macmillan, Penguin Random House, and Simon & Schuster. Formerly the "Big Six," until the merger of Penguin and Random House in 2013.

BISAC

An acronym for Book Industry Standards and Communications.

BISAC codes

The BISAC subject headings list; a standard used to categorize books based on topical content.

bitcoin

The most popular cryptocurrency, generally deemed the first of its kind. The open source software comes with an elusive and mysterious history. Satoshi Nakamoto is the name used by the unknown person(s) who designed the bitcoin, but no one is really sure who made it.

bleed

To extend an element that is printed right up to the page edge, such as an image or background tint, beyond the trim size to allow for variations in trimming.

blockchain

As part of the implementation of Bitcoin, the first blockchain database was devised to record the cryptocurrency transactions. Blockchain technology operates as a public, verified digital ledger that records transactions as a chain (string) of data, stored on a decentralized network. Information, once entered, can't be altered. Blockchain also has several non-cryptocurrency applications, including smart contracts and the recording of other digital assets.

blog

A regularly updated section on your website; a useful way to help you establish your subject matter expertise and connect with your readers.

blog hop

A list of web links that appears on multiple blogs, allowing readers to hop from one blog to the next in the series. *Also:* link-up.

blog tour

A series of pre-arranged blog posts, usually scheduled during the months just before and after a book launch.

Book2Look

A widget offering samples from your book alongside social links.

BookBaby

An ebook publisher and aggregator.

book block

PDF files that comprise all book content except the cover. *See also:* interior.

book blurb

A short description of a book, often used on the back cover.

BookBub

An ebook discovery service featuring a free daily email that notifies readers of discounted ebooks.

book categories

See: BISAC.

book chainstores

Book outlets that share a brand and central management, usually with standardized business methods and practices, and spread nationwide or worldwide.

book doctoring

See: content editing.

Book Espresso machine

A machine that can print and bind any book as print-on-demand within five minutes.

book fair

An exhibition and convention for publishers, authors, and booksellers.

book review

See: review.

Booksellers Association of Great Britain and Ireland (BA)

The trade association for booksellers.

Books In Print

A catalog, usually digital, primarily for use by bookstores and libraries, listing millions of books with ISBNs; published by Bowker.

book trailer

A video advertisement for a book, much the same as a film trailer.

Bowker

A for-profit corporation that is the sole provider of and registrar for ISBNs in the US.

bricks-and-mortar (brick) bookstore

A physical store; said of a retailer, in contrast to online operations.

C**call to action (CTA)**

The part of a marketing message that attempts to persuade a person to perform a desired action.

case bound

A type of binding and the industry term for a book in hardback/hard-cover format.

click-through

The process of clicking on a hyperlink or online advertisement to the target destination.

click-through open rate (CTOR)

Metrics used to measure the effectiveness of your email marketing campaigns.

click-through rate (CTR)

The average number of click-throughs per hundred ad impressions, expressed as a percentage.

CMYK

A color model for print books, using cyan (C), magenta (M), yellow (Y), and black (K). *See also:* RGB, greyscale.

codex

A physical book which may be constructed of vellum, papyrus, or similar materials, as well as paper, and handwritten or printed.

collaborative consumption

An economic model based on the sharing, swapping, and renting of services. The “sharing economy” or “collaborative economy” can be seen in platforms like Airbnb or Kickstarter and is growing in fintech (financial technology), through solutions like peer-to-peer lending.

commission (1)

A percentage of book sales paid to the author. Often used interchangeably with royalties.

commission (2)

To order or authorize the production of publications, services or materials.

content editing

Editing with a focus on broad issues such as pacing, character development, veracity, relevance, and structure. *Also:* structural editing, development(al) editing, book doctoring, or manuscript appraisal.

content editor

The person who conducts a content edit.

content marketing

The creation and sharing of useful material like videos, blogs, and social media posts to generate leads for your book.

conversion

The process of putting a manuscript into a digital format suitable for

use by a publisher, such as converting a Word document into an EPUB file.

co-op advertising

Advertising whose cost is shared between or among different companies. Such advertising is especially advantageous to smaller companies with limited budgets.

copyediting

Editing with a focus on the detail, such as syntax, grammar, verb tense, word usage, punctuation, and consistency. *Also*: line editing.

copyeditor

The person who conducts a copyedit of your copy (manuscript material).

copyright

The exclusive legal right to publish, perform, or record a literary work, to profit from it, and to authorize others to do the same.

Compare: license.

cost per click (CPC)

Internet advertising model used to direct traffic to websites, in which an advertiser pays a website owner when their advertisement is clicked. Also used to refer to the cost charged for each click through from the ad to the product. *Also*: pay per click.

cost per impression (CPI)

Also known as pay per impression. Internet advertising model, in which advertisers pay for the number of times an ad is shown on a website, regardless of whether or not it is clicked. *Also*: pay per impression.

co-venture

Undertaking whose costs and responsibilities are shared by more than one company or publisher.

cover design

Aesthetic layout on the covers of a book, usually intended to be attractive or alluring to the eye.

cover spread

The entire cover of a physical book, from the front, including the spine, to the back.

CreateSpace

An Amazon-owned publisher and distributor of self-published print books.

credit line

Line of text that assigns credit to the owner of the copyright of the material it refers to.

critique

See: content editing.

crowd-

A prefix used to denote a collaborative effort by a group.

crowdfunding

Funding a project by raising small donations from many contributors.

crowdsourcing

Gathering information, feedback, or work on a project by requesting input from a large number of contributors.

cryptocurrency

Any digital currency, operating independently of a central bank, using encryption techniques to regulate the generation, verification, and transfer of funds. Using cryptography for regulation and security allows a decentralized system, meaning no central repository or administrator oversees the processes. Instead, it uses a blockchain. There are several kinds of cryptocurrency; three of the best known to date are bitcoin, ethereum, and ripple.

customer acquisition cost (CAC)

Measuring how much money a new customer has cost you.

D**dashboard**

An interface, usually web-based, that organizes and displays information on a single screen.

database

A program that allows you to organize your information in an efficient manner on one platform.

dedication

Part of the front matter that dedicates a book to a specific person, place, or thing.

Demy Octavo

A very popular book format, which measures 216 x 138 mm.

developmental editing

See: content editing.

developmental editor

Person who deals with the overall organization of a manuscript rather than with detailed changes such as spelling and punctuation.

digital printing

A method of mass-production printing using toners on a press printing direct from a digital-based image. More suitable for shorter runs and most often used for print-on-demand books. *Compare:* offset printing.

digital wallet

Any electronic device or application that allows electronic transactions, using cryptocurrency or government-based currencies.

discounts

There are two kinds of discounts in publishing: retail discount, when books are offered at a reduced sale price to the reader; and publisher's discount, offered to wholesalers, distributors, and retailers.

discoverability

The process of making something discoverable for consumers.

disintermediation

The removal of intermediaries from a supply chain or cutting out the middleman in a transaction.

distributed ledger

A distributed ledger (also called shared ledger) is a consensus of replicated, shared, and synchronized digital data geographically spread across multiple sites, countries, or institutions where there is no central administrator or centralized data storage.

distributor

A service that makes books available for purchase by bricks-and-mortar or online retailers. *Compare:* aggregator.

DOC, DOCX

Microsoft Word file types.

domain name

A registered alias for an IP address; the most basic URL of a website, e.g. “selfpublishingadvice.org”.

DPI (dots per inch)

A measure of the resolution of a graphic file, a computer monitor, or potential printing density.

Draft2Digital

A popular ebook aggregator and publishing service.

dust jacket

A detachable outer cover that protects the book, printed with the cover design. Usually for hardback/hardcover books.

E**ebook**

An abbreviation of electronic (digital) book.

editorial review

A professional critic’s opinion of a book published online or in a periodical. *See also:* review.

eID/electronic identity

Identity in a digital format. Often involves an identity card with embedded chip, certification, separate signatures for authentication and verification, etc. eID is legally binding and used to sign smart contracts in a number of countries.

email marketing

The promotion of products or services to list subscribers via email.

em dash and en dash

The en dash (longer than a **hyphen**) connects things that are related to each other by distance or range, as in the May–September issue of a magazine (also including June, July, and August). The em dash (longer than an en dash) is used to add an additional thought within a sentence, or to substitute for something missing. *See also:* hyphen.

encryption

The process of encoding messages. Encryption is vital to fintech, the blockchain, and anything else that needs to be secure. Data, like names and numbers, is turned into a code using algorithms (mathematical formulas). A key is required to turn that code back into useful data.

encumber

To license a right to another party, thereby creating restrictions on how that right may be used in the future.

end matter

See: back matter.

endorsement quotes

Short reviews of your book written by a well-known author, professional, or personality in your author niche.

epilogue

A section or chapter at the end of a book that comment on or draws conclusions about what has happened or been explained within the text.

EPUB

A common ebook file format.

ePublishing

The publication of digital works such as ebooks.

ereader

A handheld device on which electronic versions of books, newspapers, magazines, etc. can be read.

etailer

An online retailer.

ether

The native cryptocurrency of the Ethereum platform, used to pay for computational services there.

Ethereum

A blockchain-based cryptocurrency platform that runs smart contracts, already in use by writers and artists.

Ethical Author

Alliance of Independent Authors campaign encouraging and educating authors in best practices in writing and publishing.

exclusivity

A publishing contract that binds you solely to one publisher. In self-publishing, being exclusive to one particular store or retailer.

F**Facebook ad**

Advertising via Facebook that allows you to choose your target audience based on demographics, behavior, or contact information.

fintech

Financial technology that is allowing the disruption of traditional financial networks, facilitating innovation and the possibility of an author-centric financial model.

first rights

The exclusive right to publish a work for the first time.

font

A specific typeface of a certain size and style. *Compare:* typeface.

footnotes

Reference citations and supplementary information at the bottom of a page.

formatting

The process of designing a book for electronic distribution, with the desired layout, fonts, and appearance. *Compare:* typesetting.

forum

An online place where people with common interests or backgrounds come together to find and share information and discuss topics of interest.

front list

Traditional term for books in their first year of publication.

front matter

The sections of a book preceding the first chapter. *Also:* prelims. *Compare:* back matter.

full-service distribution

Wholesalers and distributors who perform a broad range of services,

such as stocking inventories, operating warehouses, supplying credit, and employing salespeople, as well as delivering goods.

G

galley copy

See: proof.

genre

A general category for a creative work, such as romance, science fiction, mystery.

ghostwriting

Writing all or part of a book on behalf of a collaborator whose name will be listed as the author.

go direct

To publish books to a retailer without the use of an intermediary service like an aggregator or distributor.

Goodreads

A social media site owned by Amazon, which is just for books. Readers connect with friends, get book recommendations, write reviews, and make reading lists.

Goodreads advertising

Pay-per-click advertising on Goodreads.

Goodreads giveaway

An online book giveaway that any Goodreads member can enter.

Google Adwords

Text-based ads that show up next to Google search results, graphic display ads that show up on websites or apps, or YouTube video ads that show up during videos.

Google Play

An ebook retailer which, although still in operation, has been closed to new authors for several years and is not expected to reopen.

Google Preview

Google Play's interface for viewing excerpts of an ebook before purchase. *Compare:* Look Inside the Book.

go wide

To sell books through a variety of retailers; the opposite of exclusivity, in which books are sold through one retailer.

greyscale

A color model that uses only shades of black. *See also:* CMYK, RGB.

guest blogging

Writing a post or short article for someone else's blog.

H**halftone**

A method of representing an image with dots of varying sizes.

hardback/hardcover

A book with a hard rather than paper cover; or the cover itself.

hard return

Pressing the enter or return key to force a line break instead of allowing the text to flow naturally.

hashtag

A word or phrase immediately preceded by the # symbol. When you click a hashtag, you see other social media updates containing the same keyword or topic.

headshot

A professional-looking head-and-shoulders photograph used for promotional purposes.

hit

Accessing a web page or a file, image, or script on the page.

house ad

A self-promotional ad that you run on your own website to sell your own products.

hybrid author

An author who uses both trade and self-publishing services. (Not to be confused with hybrid publishing or partnership publishing.)

hybrid publishing

See: partnership publishing.

hyphen

Connects two things that are intimately related, usually words that work together as a single concept or joint modifier (e.g. self-publishing, two-thirds).

I**iBooks**

The iBooks Store, an online publisher/retailer for ebooks. Also the application used to read books downloaded from the iBooks Store.

impression

A single display of an advertisement or web page.

imprint

A name used by a publisher to identify their books. Imprints are frequently genre-specific, and a single publisher may have multiple imprints.

inbound marketing

A model that relies on the initiative of customers to find and purchase a product, such as content marketing, social media marketing, and search engine optimization.

independent

Not involving the “Big Five” publishing corporations; self-published.

InDesign

Professional book formatting and design software produced by Adobe.

index

A list directing readers to specific subject matter in a book.

indie author

An author who acts as the creative director of their own books, whether through self-publishing, assisted self-publishing, or traditional publishing. *Compare:* self-publishing, traditional publishing.

Indie Author Fringe

Free online author conference organized three times a year by the

Alliance of Independent Authors, fringe to London Book Fair, Book Expo America, and Frankfurt Book Fair.

Ingram ipage

An online books search, order, and account management platform for bookstores.

IngramSpark

A large publisher and distributor of print-on-demand books and ebooks.

initial coin offering (ICO)

An unregulated means of crowdfunding by which money is raised for a new cryptocurrency, selling tokens in the currency to raise money.

Instafreebie

A streamlined way to send book copies to reviewers, beta readers, or bloggers by providing a link for people to download your book for free.

interior

All content within a book, except the covers. *Compare:* book block.

IPR License

Platform for authors, publishers, and agents to list and license publishing rights, providing access to a global marketplace. Owned by Frankfurt Book Fair with the Copyright Clearance Center.

ISBN (International Standard Book Number)

A unique, numeric identifier for a particular edition and format of a book.

J

jacket

See dust jacket.

joint venture

See: partnership publishing.

JPEG

A format for compressing image files; the most common image format used by digital cameras.

K**KDP Select**

An optional program under Kindle Direct Publishing that requires exclusivity in exchange for promotional tools and enrollment in Kindle Unlimited and Kindle Owners' Lending Library.

keyword

A word or phrase used by search engines to identify matching subjects. For example, an edition of *Moby Dick* might have the keywords *whaling*, *revenge*, and *nautical themes*.

Kindle

Amazon's line of proprietary ebook readers.

Kindleboards

An online discussion forum dedicated to publishing on Amazon.

Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP)

Amazon's publishing and distribution platform for ebooks.

Kindle Owners' Lending Library (KOLL)

A program under Kindle Direct Publishing that allows Amazon Prime subscribers to read one free ebook per month. Enrollment in KOLL is mandatory for KDP Select authors. *See also*: Kindle Unlimited (KU).

Kindle Scout

An Amazon program in which readers nominate books for publication under the Kindle Press imprint. Winners receive a five-year contract, 50% royalties, and a \$1,500 advance.

Kindle Singles

Amazon's digital, curated imprint for short works (primarily novellas, short fiction, and long-form journalism).

Kindle Unlimited (KU)

A program under Kindle Direct Publishing that allows subscribers to read ebooks in the KU catalog for free. Enrollment in KU is mandatory for KDP Select authors. *See also*: Kindle Owners' Lending Library.

Kindle Worlds

Amazon's digital publishing platform for fan fiction.

Kobo

A Toronto-based digital publishing platform, initially meant to service users of the Kobo e-reader.

L**launch party**

Celebration of the publication of a book. Can be hosted at any suitable location, but popular spots include bookstores, libraries, coffee shops, or the author's home. You can also host a virtual book launch online.

LCCN (Library of Congress Control Number)

A unique identifier assigned to books by the US Library of Congress. *Compare:* ISBN.

legacy publishing

A somewhat derogatory term for trade-publishing.

license

Legal permission granted to someone other than the original holder of a right; for example, permitting a publisher to print a work for which you hold the copyright. *Compare:* copyright.

limited edition

A book printed in limited numbers, usually for special editions.

line editing

See: copyediting.

list price

The recommended retail price of a book. Set by the author or publisher and often referred to as the RRP.

literary agent

Person who acts as an intermediary for an author in transactions with the publisher.

litho printing (lithography)

A method of mass-production printing using wet ink and printing plates. More suitable for longer runs. *See also:* offset printing.

Compare: digital printing.

Look Inside the Book

An Amazon feature that allows customers to view excerpts from an ebook or print book before buying. *Compare:* Google Preview.

M**makeready stage**

Point in the printing process when a text is ready to be printed.

manuscript

Complete version of a book (often as an electronic text file) prepared by the author.

manuscript appraisal

See: content editing.

manuscript conversion

See: conversion.

marketing plan

A strategic plan that details all of the activities you need to deliver to promote yourself and your book.

mass-market paperback

Smaller, less expensive version of a book that is usually printed well after the hardcover and trade paperback versions have been made available.

media kit

A package of key information to send to media or journalists, retailers, book bloggers, event planners, editors, or anyone who plans on writing about you and your book. May include an author photo and bio, a book cover image, a full synopsis, a one-sentence description, book details, frequently asked questions, an excerpt, and reviews or media coverage.

media list

A collection of media outlets and contacts that you reach out to in order to increase awareness of your book.

media outlet

Any channel for disseminating news about your book, such as news-

papers, magazines, radio shows, TV shows, online news sites, podcasts, or blogs.

metadata

The details of a book other than its actual text, such as author's name, publisher, book description, ISBN, and keywords.

micropayments

Financial transactions of very small sums of money.

MOBI

Amazon's digital format for Kindle ebooks.

N**NetGalley**

An online book reviewing site. Book reviewers, librarians, booksellers, educators, and media professionals request complimentary ebooks in exchange for reviews.

networking

Using and expanding your social network or sphere of influence to promote your book.

newswire distribution

Circulation of news through a service intended for journalists and media outlets.

niche

A specialized target market characterized by a particular interest, topic, or subject.

Nielsen

The sole registrar for ISBNs in the UK and Ireland.

nonexclusive contract

Legal agreement in which the publisher does not exercise exclusive rights over the materials published in your book.

Nook

Barnes & Noble's line of e-readers and associated retailer.

O

offset printing

A method of mass-production printing in which the images on metal plates are transferred (offset) onto rubber blankets or rollers and thereby to paper. *Compare:* digital printing.

off-the-book-page attention

Mention made of a book outside the context of a book review, such as plugging a book on a talk show.

online bookseller/retailer

Internet-based bookstore.

online marketing

Using online methods to advertise, sell, or dispense products.

OUTIA (Open Up To Indie Authors)

Alliance of Independent Authors campaign encouraging bookstores, libraries, reviewing bodies, literary events, and prizes to find ways to include self-publishing writers in their programs. Uses the hashtag #PublishingOpenUp.

out of print (OOP)

Book no longer in a publisher's book inventory (and for which there is no reprint planned).

P

P2P lending

P2P means peer-to-peer, or person-to-person, and refers to anything decentralized and direct. P2P lending is loaning money to individuals without the systems and processes typically used by traditional financial institutions. Instead, it is often handled by digital platforms that use an algorithm to manage transactions between parties.

paperback

A book bound in stiff paper or flexible card. *See also:* mass-market paperback, trade paperback.

partnership publishing

A publishing arrangement in which the author and the publisher both contribute financially to the book's production, sharing risks and rewards. Sometimes used as a euphemism for vanity publishing. *See also:* joint venture, hybrid publishing, self-publishing services, shared publishing, subsidized publishing.

pay per click

See: cost per click

pay per impression

See: cost per impression

pbook

A physical, printed book generally constructed of a number of sheets of paper, bound in cardboard. *See also:* codex.

PDF (portable document format)

A file format popular for its cross-compatibility, particularly in keeping layout and fonts as intended. The preferred file format for print-on-demand and fixed layout ebooks.

perfect bound

An unsewn binding where glue/adhesive attaches the pages at the spine. Usually with a paper cover, hence the more common name paperback. *Compare:* hardback.

permafree

A book permanently available for free from online retailers; a strategy used to increase visibility and gain new readers by giving away a book, often the first in a series.

permission

Agreement from a copyright holder that permits the reproduction or publication of copyrighted material. Also the process of securing agreements from copyright holder.

permissioned blockchain

Blockchain with access restricted to a particular group. *Compare:* unpermissioned blockchain.

pitch emails

Emails targeting media contacts to get coverage for a book, which should include key points about the book and author.

plant costs

Initial costs incurred by a traditional printer in preparation for the first printing run of a given title.

platform

The computer hardware or online system used to run a program or digital tool.

plot

Flow or succession of actions in a story.

podcast

Online audio broadcast available on a website or to download.

prelims

Pages before a book properly begins. May include copyright page, table of contents, acknowledgments, and other publishing information. *Also:* front matter. *Compare:* back matter.

pre-order

A marketing tactic used by authors to offer readers the opportunity of reserving a copy of a book prior to its official release date.

press release

An official announcement that provides information about an event to reporters, bloggers, and other media outlets.

Prime Reading

A program that allows Amazon Prime subscribers to read free ebooks from a catalog of approximately 1,000 titles selected by Amazon.

print-on-demand (POD)

Printing in small quantities or as needed, usually by digital printing.

print ready

Used to describe the final layout file of a book, usually in PDF format, that is ready to go to the printer.

print run

The number of copies printed in a single order.

Pronoun

A now defunct ebook publisher and aggregator.

proof

A copy of a book printed for final inspection and correction of errors. *Also:* galley copy. *Compare:* advance review copy.

proofreading

The final step in the editing process, with a focus on essential corrections such as misspellings, the accuracy of captions, headings, page numbers, etc.

publication date

Official date when a book is to be released to the public.

publicist

Professional or press agent who promotes a book, often by generating free advertising.

publicity tour

Public circuit an author makes to publicize a book, either prior to or soon after the publication date.

PubMatch

Rights management platform that allows authors and publishers to trade publishing rights and permissions with publishers, agents, and other rights buyers. Owned by the London Book Fair.

Q**QR code**

A machine-readable code that consists of black and white squares and is typically used for storing URLs.

R**region**

A geographical area served by a retailer. For example, Amazon operates separate regional websites for the US, Canada, Mexico, the UK, India, France, Germany, China, Japan, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Australia, and Brazil. *Also*: territory.

remainder

A book returned to the publisher after not having sold, often offered for later sale at a discounted price.

return

A book returned to the publisher and refunded after failing to sell in a bookstore.

reversion

The process of reclaiming rights licensed to a publisher.

review

A customer's opinion of a book published on a retailer website or similar venue. *Compare:* editorial review.

RGB

A color model for digital and online use, using red, green, and blue. *See also:* CMYK, greyscale.

rights/publishing rights

The right to publish or produce a book, TV show, film, translation, or other format based on your material, in a particular medium or a particular territory. Granted to the publisher/producer by license.

ROI (return on investment)

The amount you spend versus how much money you earn.

royalties

A percentage of book sales paid to the author. Often used interchangeably with commission.

S**saddlestitch binding**

Pages are bound along the fold with two staples.

sales funnel

A process that converts your website and social media visitors into paying readers by convincing them to purchase your books.

sales handle

A one-sentence call to action epitomizing your book, which is frequently used in online marketing.

sales rank

A ranking calculated by Amazon on the basis of daily sales and downloads of a book. *Also:* bestseller rank.

Scrivener

Popular editing and organizational software designed specifically for writers.

secondary rights

The right to resell a work after its first publication.

self-publishing

A form of publishing in which the author oversees the publishing process, retains control over creative decisions and disposition of publishing rights, and bears the costs of production.

self-publishing service

A company or freelancer commissioned by an author to provide any of the seven processes involved in publishing a book: editorial, design, production, distribution, marketing, promotion, or rights service. Some companies offer a full-service package. *Compare:* partnership publishing.

sell sheet

See: advance information sheet.

SEO (search engine optimization)

The process of making your web page more easily findable and indexed by search engines; or more relevant to particular topics in order to attract more visitors.

shared publishing

See: partnership publishing.

shelf life

The time an unsold book remains on the shelf of a retail store before being replaced by fresh or better-selling stock.

short discount

Smaller-than-typical discount on books purchased by retailers and wholesalers.

short-run print

Printing of a limited number of copies of a book in a single print run. Can now be as low as 300–400 copies. For fewer copies, digital printing is generally a better option.

slush pile

The unsolicited manuscripts submitted to a traditional publisher.

small press

Smaller publishing house that releases books often intended for specialized audiences.

smart contracts

Computer programs that automatically execute legally binding contracts. These automated and often blockchain-based computer protocols facilitate, verify, or enforce digital agreements, saving time and reducing costs in common legal and financial transactions and potentially replacing lawyers and banks.

Smashwords

A popular ebook publisher and aggregator.

special sales

Book sales through nonbookstore outlets such as restaurants, gift stores, and health spas.

spine width

Width of part of the book that is visible on a bookshelf. The spine connects the front and back covers.

spiral bound

A method of binding in which wire or plastic is wound through holes punched along the side of a book.

split A/B test

Comparing two versions of something to see which performs better (sometimes called split testing).

structural edit

See: developmental editing.

style sheet

Document prepared during copyediting that records consistency and style decisions, such as how numbers, abbreviations, word usage, and punctuation are to be handled.

subscript

A character (number, letter, or symbol) that is set slightly below the normal line of type. It is usually smaller than the rest of the text.

subsidiary right

The right to publish a work based on the original material but in a

different format (e.g. translations, audiobooks, film). *Also*: subright or sublease.

subsidized publishing

See: partnership publishing.

superscript

A character (number, letter, or symbol) that is set slightly above the normal line of type. It is usually smaller than the rest of the text.

synopsis

A summary introducing your main characters, the main conflict, and the basic emotional arc of your story.

T

table of contents

A list, usually in the front matter, of the book's chapters or main sections and their opening page numbers.

target audience

A specific audience that is most likely to buy your books and is usually based on demographic information or areas of interest.

termination clause

Section in a contractual agreement that specifies particular behavior, actions, or events that would result in nullification of the contract.

territory

See: region.

thumbnail

A small representation of a larger image, intended as a preview.

token

A type of security issued in digital form. For example, a READ token gives the owner the right to read an ebook.

trade paperback

A book bound with a paper or heavy stock cover, usually with a larger trim size than that of a mass-market paperback.

trade-publisher (traditional publisher)

A company that invests in publishing a manuscript, submitted by an

author, and controls most creative and marketing decisions. Trade-publishers bear the cost of production and promotion in exchange for a sizable percentage (typically 90%+) of the receipts from a book.

trim size

The dimensions of a print book, specifically the page size.

Tweep

Followers on the social media platform Twitter.

Twitter handle

The name, always preceded by @, that is used on the social media platform Twitter.

typeface

A set of letters, numbers, and characters that are all in the same style and that are used in printing. *Compare:* font.

typesetting

Professional preparation of a book for print with the desired layout, fonts, and appearance. *Compare:* formatting.

U

unit cost

The production or base cost of printing and putting together a book.

unique visitor (unique)

An individual who accesses a website. *Compare:* hit.

universal link

A link that allows you to simplify the process of author discoverability by directing your book customers to your preferred online retailer.

university press

Publishing house owned and operated by a university. Such presses typically issue academic material, often including works by their own academics.

unpermissioned blockchain

Blockchain open to all.

unsolicited manuscript

Manuscript sent to a publisher who did not request it.

URL (uniform resource locator)

The address of a web page.

V**vanity publishing (press)**

A generally exploitative form of publishing in which the author pays to have their book published, with excessively high fees and substandard service. *Compare:* partnership publishing.

virtual book tour (VBT)

Advertisement strategy centered on publicizing a book on the internet, including ads on websites that the target audience frequents and book giveaways.

vlogging

A blog that contains video content. This growing segment of the blogosphere is sometimes referred to as the vlogosphere.

W**wholesaler**

A company that sells books to retailers, often in bulk and at a discount.

word of mouth

Publicity through recommendations from friends, family, and associates.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dan Holloway

I started my self-publishing journey on 2 January 2009, when I posted a manifesto on Myspace entitled “Let’s Make 2009 Publishing’s Year Zero.” Within a week or so, twenty-two writers from eight countries had got together to form Year Zero Writers, a collective of self-publishing literary and experimental-fiction writers who were frustrated with the increasingly narrow mainstream staple of traditional publishing. We were very lucky. We made a lot of noise, and because the playing field was relatively clear at that point, people let us have our say. Within a year, I had written pieces about self-publishing for half the internet, was listed as one of Mashable’s top writers on Twitter (the first time, incidentally, I appeared alongside Orna), had my debut novel listed as one of *ebooksjustpublished*’s top 10 DRM-free books of 2009, and had launched Year Zero Writers live at the iconic Rough Trade on Brick Lane.

It’s been a bit of a whirl since then. I have built on the relationships established with live venues in those early days, appearing at Stoke Newington Literary Festival for the past three years, coordinating the poetry for Chipping Norton Literary Festival, performing at Cheltenham Poetry Festival and Brighton Fringe, and winning the international spoken word show Literary Death Match as the only self-published author taking part. And I’ve been lucky enough to get articles about self-publishing into the national press. There is a world of wonderful opportunities out there for the self-published author.

But for most of us, most of the time, those opportunities have to be hard fought for, and that's why a book like this matters so much.

Debbie Young

Like Alice down the rabbit-hole, I fell into self-publishing more or less by accident. In a career spent in journalism, public relations, and marketing, my brief was always to build understanding between my employers and their target audiences. A significant birthday provided the wake-up call to get round to what I'd always wanted to do when I grew up: write books.

Having joined ALLi almost as soon as it was formed, I welcomed Orna's invitation in 2013 to become commissioning editor of its Self-Publishing Author Advice Center blog. I'm now an ambassador and evangelist for the movement, speaking at public events and writing for other publications to raise awareness.

Meanwhile I've been practicing what I preach, self-publishing a professionally produced body of fiction, including a new series of classic mystery novels plus a mixed range of nonfiction, and founding the Hawkesbury Upton Literature Festival to showcase authors of all kinds.

As co-author of *Opening Up to Indie Authors*, I've found enormous satisfaction in deploying the skills and experience gained in my previous career for the good of the self-publishing movement. I hope and believe that this book will foster better understanding and cooperation between indie authors and all sectors of the publishing trade, and decimate misplaced resentment, helping to shape a brighter future for us all.

Orna Ross (Series Editor)

I was born and raised in Ireland and now live in London and St Leonards-on-Sea, England. I worked for twenty years in media and publishing, and published fiction and nonfiction with both small and trade-publishing houses before taking my rights back and striking out

as an indie author in 2011. The radically empowering experience of publishing my own work led me to form the Alliance of Independent Authors in 2012, work for which UK publishing trade magazine, the *Bookseller*, has kindly listed me as one of their Top 100 people in publishing. This is a tribute to the dedication of the wonderful ALLi team and all our members (ALLi, pronounced “allies”).

OTHER BOOKS FROM ALLI

The Alliance of Independent Authors publishes a growing library of industry guides for self-publishing writers, drawing on the wisdom and experiences of its advisor and member network.

Choosing the Best Self-Publishing Companies and Services by Jim Giammatteo and John Doppler

How to find the ideal self-publishing service, whether you're in search of a freelance editor or designer or seeking a full-range assisted publisher. Includes a listing of Alliance of Independent Authors partner members, who provide vetted and approved services. Updated regularly.

How Authors Sell Publishing Rights by Orna Ross and Helen Sedwick

Being a successful indie author means understanding that you sell not just books, but publishing rights. This guide draws together advice from a number of sources to explain such rights in clear language, without legal jargon, from the author's perspective. It is full of advice on how best to sell rights in the new publishing landscape and ensure you get a good deal, and includes examples of good contracts and negotiating tips.

How to Get Your Self-Published Book into Bookstores by Debbie Young

This is the companion book to our #Authors4Bookstores campaign, expanding considerably on the chapter on bookstores within *Opening Up to Indie Authors*. It provides encouragement, inspiration, and practical guidelines to help all authors to build better relationships with bookstores. It explains how bookstores operate; how to make your book bookstore-ready; how to approach booksellers professionally and with confidence; how to make an effective case to pitch your book for shelf space; how to deal both with

independent stockists and with chainstores; why bookstores are important to all authors; and how forward-thinking booksellers are developing new and exciting store concepts. After reading this book, whether or not you decide to seek opportunities to get your books into bookstores, you'll know that you've made an informed decision and reached your conclusion for all the right reasons. This book is an easy, quick, and interesting read for all authors, no matter how they are published.

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